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Francis de Sales, Saint, bp. of Geneva

AN ABRIDGMENT

OF THE

INTERIOR SPIRIT OF THE RELIGIOUS

OF THE

VISITATION

OF THE

BLESSED VIRGIN MARY.

EXPLAINED BY ST. FRANCIS, OF SALES, BISHOP AND PRINCE
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MAUPAS, BISHOP OF EVREUX.

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TATION OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY.

CHAPTER I.

*Of the Interior Spirit of the Daughters of the
Visitation, founded on Mount Calvary.*

The little congregation of the Daughters of the Visitation resembles a sacred fountain from which many souls will draw the waters of salvation; their whole life, both interior and exterior, is consecrated to God. It is a life entirely spiritual, the actions and resignations of which are so many prayers. All their hours are dedicated to God; yes, even those of sleep and recreation are the fruits of charity. The glory which redounds to God from the seclusion of so many persons, assembled together for the increase of divine love, multiplying every

day, makes an almost infinite sum of spiritual riches and treasures of grace.

They are living holocausts, hosts and precious victims of perpetual sacrifice, who offer themselves to God on the altar of Calvary, to serve, without intermission, Jesus Christ crucified, their only spouse ; they participate in the spirit of the cross, they enter into the holy dispositions of his martyrdom, to learn how to crucify themselves at each moment. They renounce all the movements of their heart, except those which incline them to love him ; their tongues are employed only in praising him ; they make no other use of their thoughts than to adore him, and to admire his greatness. Their hands are occupied only in gathering at the foot of the cross the little virtues of humility, meekness, and simplicity, which grow there, and which are watered with the blood of their well beloved, fastened to their hearts as on his cross ; their minds act only to learn and penetrate the meaning of this divine lesson of self-renunciation, carrying the cross and following their crucified Savior, in

abandonments, privations, ignominies, injuries, agonies, and in all his other sufferings, as also of entering into the practice of these amiable virtues of indifference, tranquillity, equality of mind, of obedience, poverty, and charity, which are comprised in the great lesson taught us on Calvary. Meditating day and night on this book of the predestinate, at the head of which is written, "I will accomplish thy will, and thy law shall be in the midst of my heart," love induces them to receive and eat this sacred volume, to fill their breasts, and to nourish their hearts; the secrets enclosed therein are always before their eyes, that they may meditate thereon, and they bear these maxims on their arms to reduce them to practice, for which all the powers of their souls bless and praise incessantly the majesty of God. Amiable volume, which, although it casts a bitterness into the interior, since it conducts to the perfect mortification of self-love, yet is sweeter than honey to the lips, since the mortification of self-love is an unparalleled consolation, causing

him and his love to reign who was crucified for the love of us. Thus their greatest bitterness is, on this sacred mount, changed into the sweetness of a most abundant peace, which replenishes them with true happiness, and establishes them in the abode of the wounds of the spouse, in which they find an abyss of graces that confirm them in their generous enterprises under their crucified King. This causes them invariably to tend to a union with him, giving them this happy experience, that one hour spent in this holy retreat is far better than thousands of days passed in the palaces of princes, since it is there he gains their hearts. Alas! if this Savior has done so much for us, what ought we not do for him? If he has sacrificed his life for us, why do we not subject our whole life to his service and glory?

Reflections and Maxims of St. Francis, of Sales, on the same subject.

A heart which esteems and truly loves Jesus crucified, cherishes his ignominies, his torments, and his death, and when some

little portion of these falls to its lot, it is rejoiced thereat, and embraces them with love.

St. Peter had sufficient courage to say live Jesus on Mount Thabor; but to repeat the same on Mount Calvary, is peculiar to the loving fidelity of the blessed Virgin and her amiable children.

The true lover of the cross and passion of our Lord, desires no other joy than that which is found on Mount Calvary with Jesus Christ.

Although St. Peter loved Thabor more than Calvary, yet the blood which flowed on the one was more fruitful and more desirable than the light which shone on the other.

Oh! how precious are the stones which appeared so hard on Calvary, since the whole palace of the celestial Jerusalem, so brilliant, so beautiful, and so amiable, is built of these rich materials!

If jealousy could reign in the kingdom of eternal bliss, the angels would envy not only the sufferings of God for man, but those of man for God

If we desire our life to be hidden with Jesus Christ in God, we must annihilate our-

selves, and live no longer for ourselves, but for Him who has acquired life for us by his death.

Jesus Christ on the cross immolated his heart and his love for our sake ; why then do we not immolate our heart and our love on this same altar, for the love of Him who has so much loved us ?

The inhabitants of Calvary have Jesus crucified for their pilot, his cross for their mast, the winds of celestial inspiration for the sails of their vessel, and for their anchor they have a firm confidence that they will happily arrive at the port of a blessed eternity.

CHAPTER II.

St. Francis, of Sales, proposes the humility of Jesus Christ to his daughters for their imitation.

This incomparable legislator wished that his daughters should have no knowledge except that of Jesus Christ crucified ; showing them in the midst of that adorable vo-

lume these divine characters, “ Learn of me who am humble of heart.” It is this humility, my dear daughters, said this holy founder, which forms religious discipline, which is the foundation of the spiritual edifice, and the infallible mark of the children of Jesus Christ. Wherefore you should pay a special attention to it ; performing all your actions in the spirit of a profound, sincere, and frank humility. This virtue, well practised, will advance you in the exercise of a humility generally unknown ; and will so plunge you in your unworthiness, that you will disappear in your own eyes, and in those of the world ; since it is so conformable to your spirit, to avoid eclat, and seek annihilation, that if you fail you will lose your treasure, and will no longer be Daughters of the Visitation. Know then that your congregation will never exalt its branches and fruits, but in proportion as its roots are planted deep in the love of baseness and abjection.

Walk then generously in these low valleys, gathering, at the foot of the cross, the love of humility, since God himself, through

the esteem he had for it, left for a time the exercise of his royalty, annihilating himself even to the opprobrium of the cross. By this, all are taught to practice the maxims of the apostolic spirit, and you that of your institute, which requires that, if you can be useful for his glory, laboring at any work whatever, and even in erecting other congregations of servants of God, without ever establishing yourselves, you would not on this account be less agreeable to his Divine Majesty ; practising, by this means, humility in a sovereign degree ; and God, beholding in the centre of your heart this amorous inclination to abjection, would no doubt establish you, and would raise you exceedingly in that kind of life to which he has called you. Leave yourselves implicitly to the guidance of this loving conductor, without considering whither you are going, but with whom. Now, you are going with your king and your crucified spouse ; for you go with him by abasing, humbling, and contemning yourselves, even to the death of all your passions, and, I may say, even to the death of the cross. But

this humility, this abasement, this self-contempt ought to be practised sweetly, peaceably, and constantly; ever animating your humility with courage and confidence in God, who will not permit you to perform an action to attract praise, or to omit any through fear of being esteemed. In fine, let him dispose of your life, your esteem, and your honor, as he pleases, since all belongs to him. If your abjection tends to his glory, ought not your joy to increase in proportion to your abjection?

Reflections and Maxims of St. Francis, of Sales, on the same subject.

The generous humility of our Jesus, of his holy Mother, and of the most valiant soldiers of his militia, has surmounted tyrants, subdued kings, and gained the whole world to the obedience of the cross.

Christians denominate pride and vanity baseness and cowardice; and, on the contrary, they consider the acceptation of contempts, humiliations, and the love of abjection, true greatness and courage,

It is pride that troubles us ; it is self-love that casts us into impatience on seeing ourselves mean and abject ; for peace and humility are inseparable.

Humility inclines us meekly to bear with ourselves, by humbling ourselves profoundly before God, without dejection or discouragement.

Humility renders our heart meek towards both the perfect and imperfect.

Whoever possesses humility acknowledges that, unless God serve as his shield and buckler, he will immediately be wounded by all kinds of sins.

The love of abjection is the root and foundation of peace and joy.

If you are not favored, cherish this state ; for God willingly beholds what is contemned, and baseness acknowledged is always very agreeable to him.

The best abjections are those which we ourselves have not chosen, and which are less agreeable to us.

True humility shuns offices, but it is not obstinate in refusing them ; it does not stop at its own unworthiness ; whenever it sees

the command, it is satisfied to be submissive to the will of God, and to undertake all that superiors direct.

It is the highest point of humility to remain tranquil, amidst contempts, abandonments, and obscurities, loving and embracing them with joy.

CHAPTER III.

On the Love of our Neighbor.

“This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.” These are, my dear daughters, the sacred words of him whom you have taken for your perfect model, the Savior of the world, by which he invites you to labor in acquiring the holy love of your neighbor, regarding him as the chief of God’s works, and his living image. Now he who will correct his neighbor in meekness and service, will be the most faithful imitator of Christ Jesus. The greatest sacrifice which you can make, my dear daughters, is to have

not only a solid love for your neighbor, but also a tender, sweet, and cordial love; to embrace cheerfully those persons for whom you feel a natural aversion. Caress the infirm, the unpolished, and those who seem to you to be of the worst humor; excuse their defects, as much as you can, in the spirit of perfect charity, and remember that infirmities are good schools of true charity for those who assist the afflicted, and of an amorous patience for those who suffer pains and afflictions. The former are at the foot of the cross with our Lady, whose compassion they imitate; and the latter are on the cross with our Lord, whose passion they exemplify. This charity ought to make you love your neighbor as yourself, not with a natural, sensual, or interested love, but with a pure and invariable charity; for, where your affection is natural, it has neither goodness nor beauty; but, when it is founded on God, it has its just value. It must be suffered to dilate and take root in your heart, as much as possible; for it will be excellent, because it comes from God;

excellent, because it tends to God ; excellent, because its bond will be God ; and excellent, because it will last eternally in God.

CHAPTER IV.

Of Charity in the Reception of Subjects.

St. Bernard observes that the apostle calls God, not the Father of Judgment, nor the God of Vengeance, but the Father of Mercies ; and the Bishop of Geneva desired that his daughters should be the Mothers of Charity rather than of Justice. You are, my dear daughters, said he to these holy souls, destined to serve for the glory of God and the necessities of your neighbor ; live then, under the care of divine Providence, like humble servants of Jesus Christ, who tenderly loves those persons that are apparently the meanest and most miserable ; wherefore, you should never forget this maxim, not to live according to

human prudence, but always agreeably to the rules of faith and of the gospel. The gospel will teach you not to consider the weakness of constitutions or corporal infirmities, but to let the weak and defective, whether of body, family or judgment, and those who are despised by the world, enter the banquet of religion. The rules of the gospel will overcome evil by good, and imperfections by meekness, for whoever would receive into the congregation only perfect creatures, and those who might occasion them no pain or trouble, would serve her neighbor but very little, and would not conform to the end of her institute, which clearly specifies that the congregation was established that such souls as desired to live entirely for God, might not be prevented by old age or weakness of constitution.

Be you the God of the unfortunate, says St. Gregory Nazianzen, in imitation of the mercy of God: Man has nothing more divine, than to be able to do good to his neighbor; learn then to open your heart to compassion and charity, for those who have need of your assistance. Oh! how well

did these two Bishops of Nazianzen and Geneva agree in their maxims, as well as in their practices of piety! The Bishop of Geneva, animated by this charity, speaking to the religious of the visitation, said that if there was but one wanting to complete the number of the community and that two subjects should present themselves at the same time to be received, one very strong and healthy, and the other weak and infirm, he would prefer receiving the infirm, though she were blind or lame, provided she had a sound mind and was well disposed to live in a profound meekness, humility, obedience, simplicity and resignation, since the robust could more easily find a retreat in another house. We must greatly fear natural reason in the discernment of grace; forgetting ourselves and combatting the human spirit in favor of abjection and pure charity. Unless the prudence of the serpent be blended with the simplicity of the dove, the Holy Spirit, it will be absolutely venomous. Suppose that a subject is naturally as bad as you could imagine; however, if she acts, in essential matters, by the

impulse of grace and not by that of nature, she deserves to be received with love and respect, as a temple of the holy spirit: nay, though she were a wolf by nature, caress this amiable person, since grace has rendered her a lamb. When subjects are gentle, pliable, innocent and pure, although they are not possessed of great minds, they should be received. For in whom does the spirit of the Lord dwell, if not in the poor and innocent, who love and fear his word? Let them only remain as associates until they be instructed and fit for the choir, if they have talents for it. You must not receive the rich because they are rich, but because they have the proper qualifications; if they are not possessed of them, and are weak, old, or subject to sickness, they are to be made associate sisters, since this rank was instituted for such constitutions. If they are strong, let them be employed in the service of the house, and even to help the lay-sisters. If subjects are well disposed, although they have not great ardor of resolution, it matters not; ardor as well as indifference often originates in natural dis-

positions of the mind, and our Lord knows how to ingraft his grace on both, in the orchard of religion.

In short you must absolutely prefer the meek and humble, although they are poor, to the rich, who are less meek and humble; not that I wish you to reject those of a strong constitution, and who are rude, untamed, and apt to commit many faults, provided they permit themselves to be polished, tamed and cured; suffering courageously, and with a docile heart, the mortification, penance, and other remedies necessary for their disease; for, generally speaking, with the assistance and care of the charitable laborer, such plants produce delicious fruits. Such were the sentiments of our amiable Father, who knew perfectly what the great Apostle said, that "virtue is perfected in infirmity." He understood well this beautiful saying of St. Gregory Nazianzen, "that a soul afflicted with sickness is near to God:" he moreover comprehended that saying of the illustrious old man, in the lives of the fathers: speaking to one of his religious, who was

reduced to a pitiable state of languor ; “it is, said he, a sovereign act of religion to return thanks to God amidst our infirmities : if you are iron, the furnace of affliction will destroy your rust ; if gold, the crucible and fire of tribulation will consume your dross, and render you more refined.”

CHAPTER V.

In what manner charity is to be exercised in foundations and missions.

My dear daughters, said this charitable Father, God has called you to an entire abnegation and renunciation of yourselves, that you may, without distinction of place, nation, or province, purely and simply propagate his glory, with no other interest than that of pleasing him ; for it ought not to be sufficient for you merely to serve your neighbor ; you must suffer yourselves to be employed either by him, or for him, according to holy obedience ; quitting God

for God, and renouncing those delights and pleasures which you might enjoy in your monasteries, to serve him amidst the pain and labor which this change of place may occasion. What matters it to a truly loving soul, whether her celestial spouse be served here or there, by this or that means? She that seeks only to please her well beloved, and is satisfied with whatever pleases him.

Daughters sacrifice the presence of their fathers and mothers, and leave their countries, to submit to an unknown husband, or at least to one whose humor is unknown to them; and why shall not the children of God be still more courageous to go and cultivate in those new hives swarms of bees to collect the honey of divine love, for the propagation of the glory of their spouse? The apostles were sent over all the earth to continue what the Savior of the world came to do, to give life to man; and not only life, but an excellent and most abundant life. Thus, my dear daughters, you are destined, as partakers of the apostolic spirit, to go and impart to many souls the knowledge of the evangelical perfection comprised in your insti-

stute ; and, although your sex hinders you from bearing the dignity of apostles, you hold their office ; for without administering the sacraments and forgiving sins, do you not go to impart life, and a most abundant life, since so many persons, in imitation of you, withdraw from the world, who would have lost heaven amidst its dangers and vanities ?

If the consideration of your weakness disturbs you, raise your eyes to God, and animate your courage ; cast all your apprehensions into the bosom of divine love. He never employs souls in great and difficult things, without giving them every knowledge and assistance requisite to acquit themselves in a manner becoming his glory ; were it necessary, he would even send an angel to conduct them. Fear nothing, my dear daughters ; go and undertake courageously all that regards the service of God ; he will be at your right hand, that no difficulty may overcome you ; he will support you with his arm, that you may follow his way.

The apostles were ignorant fishermen, yet God endowed them with wisdom in proportion to the charges he imposed on them; thus will he bless you in going, in remaining, in serving him, in serving your neighbor, in humbling yourselves even to your nothingness, and raising you again to himself. It was thus he animated the courage of his devout daughters; taking from them not only the fears of dangers and temptations, but even rendering them terrible to their enemies.

“The friend of God shall alarm the powers of hell,” said St. Ambrose; “who will not fear him whom God cherishes, who has God for the arbiter of his interest, for the protector of his cause, and for the avenger of his quarrel; for whom God himself enters into the combat to insure the victory.”

Reflections and Maxims of St. Francis, of Sales, on the same subject.

He who does not consider his neighbor in the heart of God, will be in danger of not loving him purely, constantly, or

equally. But, in this sacred heart, who can refrain from loving and supporting him? who could find him disagreeable or tedious? He is there so amiable and so much beloved, that the lover dies of love for him.

Sincere charity finds nothing too low or too difficult in the service of its neighbor. Since in heaven we shall love each other, through the love of Jesus Christ, why then does not this same love unite our hearts here below?

Jesus Christ coming into the world to save souls, rendered his zeal humble, mild, and amiable.

“The whole law,” says St. Paul, “is accomplished in one single word: “Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.”

This induced our holy prelate to reduce the spirit of the Visitation to the most solid practices of charity. The true and short definition of virtue, says St. Augustine, is the commandment of love. He has established in me, said the spouse in the canticles, the order and rule of charity; and St. Chrysostom says that charity is the princi-

ple and end of all virtues, and the foundation and summit of the spiritual edifice.

CHAPTER VI.

Of abandonment to Divine Providence.

Who can resist the strength of the arm of God? says the wise man. The whole universe, in his sight, resembles a balance which either rises or falls at the least inclination of the hand of him who holds it, and who gives it either rest or motion at his pleasure. It may also be compared to a drop of dew, which disappears at the first heat of the day without one's perceiving it, before the sun is advanced above our horizon. It is by this we learn to condemn creatures and esteem God alone; to feel our weakness and unworthiness, and to establish our confidence in him who can and will help us. This is the fourth lesson which this holy patriarch, St. Francis, would have his daughters learn of Jesus

Christ crucified, the perfect abandonment of themselves to his adorable providence. Man, says he, has been planted in the world by the hand of his Creator as a beautiful tree cultivated by his wisdom, and watered with the blood of Jesus Christ, that he may bring forth fruits worthy of the master to whom he appertains.

God, who makes thorns appear before roses in what he designs for his glory, and who permits nothing to befall those who fear and love him, but that which may purify and perfect them, is pleased that man, of his own free will, should let himself be governed by his good pleasure.

Receive then, my dear daughters, with indifference, the temptations and contradictions which occur in the spiritual life, in a perfect union of your will with that of God. This lesson is very exalted, but God, who teaches it to you, is the Most High. Should you possess nothing but him, would you not have sufficient? Do you not wish to be daughters and servants of his celestial providence, and of the loving heart of this divine Savior? Is it not on this burning

furnace of love that you have built all your hopes? Then, what does it import whether you be on Thabor or on Calvary, in this state or in that?

Happy is the soul who seeks God alone, for she will find every where what she seeks, and she will seek every where what she has.

He who loves his master only, serves him cheerfully and with great equality, on every occasion, without considering whether the effects will be useful, profitable, or hurtful. He is satisfied to know that this divine Savior loves with extreme tenderness those who are so happy as to abandon themselves to his providence, with a firm resolution to be governed by it on all occasions; for then God undertakes the care of all, the soul having nothing to do but to repose on his bosom and in his sacred arms. There all disquietudes and eagerness for enjoyment cease, and all trouble subsides.

In this state, all events and accidents are received with tranquillity; for he who is in the arms of God, who reposes on his

bosom, and who abandons himself to his good pleasure, can fear nothing; pronouncing on all occasions the holy fiat of our Savior: "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit, my body, my mind, and all that I have."

Oh, Eternal Father, says the wise man, who governeth all things by thy providence, what reason has not thy creature to cast himself into thy arms, and to abandon himself to the direction of thy adorable wisdom and bounty!

Though a mother, says our divine Savior, speaking by the prophet Isaiah, should forget the child of her bosom, yet will I never forget thee.

God belongs to the soul, says St. Bernard, because he is benign and merciful; and the faithful soul belongs to God, because she is not ungrateful. God imparts to her his grace by an impulse of his bounty, and she returns thanks to God for so worthy an effect of his amiable goodness. He suffered for my liberty, says the faithful soul, and I will suffer for his glory; he gave himself for my salvation, and I will aban-

don myself entirely to his good pleasure, and will have no other dependence than his will. He is mine, because I am his unique and cherished dove; I am his exclusively, for I listen not to the voice of a stranger, but submit to that of my God.

This is the agreeable intercourse between the providence of God with regard to his creature, and the confidence of the creature in the affection of so good and amiable a Father.

Reflections and Maxims of St. Francis on the same subject.

He who would rather die than quit the standard of the cross, has nothing to fear, for God will bless his afflictions.

You are happy if you receive with a heart filially amorous, whatever it pleases our Lord to send, with a heart paternally watchful over your perfection.

There is no recompense without victory, nor victory without combat; let us animate our courage, and convert our pains into acts of virtue.

When the heart is in heaven it cannot be agitated by the accidents of the earth.

This sovereign goodness sometimes delights in seeing his children in perplexity and pain, that they may afterwards better relish his caresses and benedictions.

It is not tranquillity which draws God into our hearts ; it is the fidelity of our love.

We must establish, as the principal foundation of our happiness, the consolation of belonging to God, and then all unpleasant events will be disregarded, having such a support and so excellent a refuge.

The Divinity furnishes a source of uninterrupted graces to those who serve him courageously, valiantly, unremittingly.—Therefore, never lose that perfect confidence which you should have in the goodness of God, says the great Apostle,

CHAPTER VII.

Of the Vow of Chastity.

The vow of chastity has always been considered as fundamental in congregations of

females : it is not necessary to declare to you, my daughters, said St. Francis, how strictly you are obliged to observe it ; for, in a word, you ought to live, breathe, and pant, but for your celestial spouse in all sanctity of mind, of words, of demeanor and of actions, by an immaculate and angelical conversation.

What a happiness for you voluntarily to observe chastity, even in this life, with the same purity, that the angels and blessed spirits necessarily observe in heaven ! This virtue is so noble that it renders souls as fair as lilies, and as pure as the sun ; it consecrates the body and procures it the inestimable advantage of being entirely dedicated to the divine majesty, so as to be able to say, “ my heart and my flesh leap for joy, through the impulse of thy love, which has made me quit every pleasure.” In effect, the spouses of our Savior, inhabitants of Calvary, should be divested of all human desires and affections, as their divine spouse was of his garments, when he arrived there ; so that having laid aside all the robes of their captivity, by continual renuncia-

tion, they remain near him at the feast of the cross, a thousand times more delightful than those of worldly nuptials, being clad with the white robe ; that is to say, with a pure intention of pleasing the lamb. You should then, my daughters, resolve to live on this sacred Mount, with your dying Savior, amidst pains and abandonments ; saying with the spouse in the canticles, “ my beloved is to me a posy of myrrh.” I will place him tenderly on my bosom and will repeat, a hundred times in the day, “ this is my hope, the living source of my happiness, the heart of my soul, and the soul of my heart ; nothing shall ever separate me from his love, since I wish for life only to render myself a holocaust agreeable to him.” It was thus that this great bishop invited these innocent souls, who had the happiness of living under his direction, to the summit of perfection and sanctity, since, in the opinion of the great St. Dennis, “ true sanctity consists in a perfect exemption from every blemish than can tarnish or disfigure the soul in the sight of God.” It is this integrity which Tertullian calls the

flower of good morals, the honor of the body, the ornament of both sexes, the foundation of sanctity, and the presage of a holy soul. These are the visible angels of whom Saint Angustin speaks, and of whom the great St. Jerome composes for the Son of God a new family, that he may be adored by virgins on earth as he is adored by angels in heaven.

Reflections and Maxims of St. Francis on the same subject.

The divine and select spouse of holy souls is a bundle of myrrh : whoever loves him, must necessarily love bitterness. Jesus Christ usually gratifies his beloved souls in this life, only with the honor of suffering much, and carrying their cross after him.

How can any one press to his breast Jesus crucified, without being wounded by the nails and thorns with which he is transpierced ?

We cannot better testify our love for this sacred Lover, than amidst tribulations ;

for this life is such, that we must eat more wormwood than honey.

Our nature is so admirable that it would experience nothing painful ; but the repugnance that we feel does not proceed from a want of love, since, if we knew that our Savior would love us more when flayed alive, we would even do it ourselves, not without repugnance, but in spite of that repugnance.

The faithful lover is not discouraged by the apprehension of the difficulties of a life crucified with our Lord, for he will be her strength.

The adorable spouse of our souls, to render us agreeable to his Eternal Father, reconciled us with his majesty, by his labors, his blood and his death.

Our Savior deserves to be served in sincerity of mind and purity of heart, since he has invited his elect thereto with so much sweetness and love.

The perfect spouse of Christ, having consecrated to God her mind, her heart, and her body, should unceasingly offer to him sacrifices of praise.

That the sacrifices of the true spouses of Christ may be agreeable to the Divine Majesty, they must be warmed and enkindled with the fire of his love.

Was it not with this same spirit that St. Ignatius of Antioch was animated, when he wished that virgins should be honored as priests of the Son of God? Was not St. Ambrose of the same sentiment when he said that virgins were martyrs? And did not St. Jerome, when describing the merit and beauty of virginity, call it the host of Jesus Christ?

CHAPTER VIII.

On the vow of Poverty.

The Gospel, that innocent thief, which formerly despoiled St. Francis of Assisium, divested in like manner the pure heart of the great St. Francis de Sales, and inspired him with those holy thoughts, with which he animated his virtuous

daughters to the love of the most exact poverty and the most conformable to the laws of the gospel. “The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air nests, but the Son of Man hath not where to lay his head.” Matt. 8 c. 20 v. This divine Savior, to repair the disorders which the love of riches has occasioned on earth, practiced the most severe and absolute poverty which his ardent charity could invent, since he lived deprived of honors, riches, conveniences, and even the necessaries of life, having in his passion suffered himself to be despoiled of his garments by the soldiers, of his flesh and skin by the whips and lashes, and of his life by death. It was love that effected all this; and it is this same love, my dear daughters, says our amiable Father, which, entering your souls, causes you happily to die to yourselves and to live to God alone, and which obliges you to a poverty so despoiled of all things, that you reserve only God for your portion, with this assurance that being entirely consecrated to him and his service he will furnish you with all that will be necessary for your pre-

servation. When he will see you divested of all exterior goods, of relations, friends, and reputation, desiring no other honor than that of the congregation, which consists in seeking the glory of God in all things, and no other esteem than that of your communities, which is to give edification to your neighbor, then he will abundantly pour forth his graces into your hearts and will make you experience that whoever perfectly abandons herself to God will never want. Cultivate then, with a careful perseverance this entire dependence on his adorable providence, which should confirm you in the perfect purity and nakedness of the spouses of Jesus Christ. Blessed are the naked, for our Lord will be their clothing, their riches, their kingdom, and their beatitude. St. Gregory of Nazianzen spoke in the same manner of those who regulate their lives according to the rules of the gospel. Their life, said this great theologian, displays riches in indigence, possession in pilgrimage, glory in contempt, patience in infirmity, a happy progeny of spiritual children in a state of

celibacy ; they find delights in contemning the pleasures of life ; they seek heaven in humility ; they possess nothing to render themselves proprietors of it ; in the flesh they live above the laws of the flesh ; God is their portion and inheritance , for the hope of a great kingdom they suffer the disgraces of indigence, and in the inconveniences of poverty, they establish their crowns.

Reflections and maxims of St. Francis on the preceding subject.

Serving faithfully our Lord we experience that the sole contentment of having quitted all for him, is better than a thousand worlds.

Human prudence says, “ blessed are the rich ;” but Jesus Christ says, “ woe to you who are rich, who have your consolation here, for you shall weep.”

She who seeks her conveniences, her pleasures, her consolations, and her own will, cannot call herself poor, since Jesus Christ has said, “ he who does not renounce all he possesses cannot be my disciple.”

If we esteem poverty, we should cultivate it; amorously suffering contempt and want.

Those religious persons who use the words mine and thine, are very far from the perfect spirit of evangelical poverty, which does not seek its own interest: and also from the sweet confidence which the children of God should have in his amorous providence.

I am content, said the Apostle, with what God has placed in my hands. To be content with little is to imitate the nature of the angels, who have need of nothing; to return in some manner to a state of innocence; to enjoy the liberty of our first parents; and to engage the sovereign bounty of God to pour forth abundantly his benefits into a generous heart, which despoils itself of creatures to be united to him alone, and which desires no other possessions than the solid treasures of his grace and love.

CHAPTER IX.

On the vow of Obedience.

It was the opinion of St. Chrysostom that David was more deserving of praise when he came out of the cavern, having spared the life of Saul, his cruel enemy, than when he overthrew Goliah. It is something to vanquish an enemy, but much more to overcome one's self; this last victory completes the glory of a combatant, its spoils are richer, its victim more illustrious, and its trophies more glorious. Man found his destruction in rebellion, and will find his crown in submission; the moment he threw off the yoke of the obedience which he owed his Creator, he lost the empire which he had over creatures, and felt the revolt of all his powers. "Thou wouldst not obey thy master, says St. Augustine, and thy slave shall give the law to thee." What can he more just, says St. Bernard, than this law of retaliation between God and man ;

that the sinner should feel a domestic sedition within him, which disputes his right and authority, since he has made war with the author of life. The great St. Francis de Sales, animated with the same spirit as the Fathers of the Church, says to his dear daughters: "Remember that the scripture assures us that the obedient man shall recount victories."

You have, my dear daughters, many visible enemies; to be victorious, you must establish your obedience in a perfect abnegation of your own will, that you may happily vanquish here on earth, to triumph hereafter gloriously in heaven and recount your victories to our Lord. Often reflect that you are christians, not to perform your own will, but that of Him who has adopted you for his eternal coheirs. By a holy submission, unite your hearts to that of our Savior, which, being engrafted on the divinity, will form the root of the tree of which you will be the branches, and your amorous obediences the fruits.—Renounce the pretended right of judging and deciding what seems best to you, leav-

ing the entire care of all to him, who should judge for you, and let him desire of you whatsoever he pleases. True obedience, says St. Gregory, discerns neither the precept nor the motive of the law; and he knows not how to judge, who knows well how to obey.

Obey then generously, that you may live in him who created you, and for whom you were baptised and elevated to the sublime dignity of spouses of Jesus Christ; let it be known, in your obedience, that it is not for the creature that you submit to the creature, but for the love of the Creator, whom you view in the creature. Place all your affections in the hands of God, that they be formed, modelled and fashioned according to his pleasure: in this point consists that perfect obedience, which has no need of being excited by threats, promises, laws or commandments; for it prevents all this by submitting to God, for God, solely on account of his goodness, which desires that all wills be submissive to him and to whomsoever he pleases. It is for this reason your congregation, (where every one

renounces her own will, and where there exists but one common will, which reigns universally, animates and governs all hearts and minds,) bears this device and honorable name. *The will of God in her.* “ *Voluntas Dei in illa.*

Wherefore, the will of our Lord, and that of those who hold his place being only one and the same will, he lives and reigns by it in you, and causes you to live and subsist in him, so that you may say boldly : “ Lord Jesus, having offered thee all that we have, we now immolate to thee all that we are ; binding our liberty on the altar of the cross that it may be an agreeable holocaust of thy good pleasure to die and be consumed in an exact obedience by the sword and fire of thy divine love.”

This is the sovereign degree of perfection, to which this great Founder of the Visitation invited those souls who had the happiness of living under his direction. He required of them a blind obedience, like to that of St. Paul, in the moment of his conversion :—“ Lord what wilt thou that I do ?” He desired that his daughters should

execute the will of God, before they had heard it, or at least before they had examined it; and as St. Augustin speaks, he wished that the soul, faithful to the sacred duties of holy obedience, should have eyes like those of the chaste dove in the canticles, moistened and washed in milk, which St. Gregory of Nice, considers as a liquid which does not reflect the shadow of any object, and which represents to us the precious obscurity of a pure soul, concealed under the veil of faith, and the darkness of the law, when she obeys blindly without seeing or knowing any thing but Him who commands.

Reflections and Maxims of St. Francis de Sales on the same subject.

The truly obedient soul often repeats these words, “Lord what wilt thou have me to do?” “Teach me to do thy will, for thou art my God.”

Let the divine will be the star on which you fix your eyes during the navigation of this mortal life, and you will happily arrive at the port of a blessed eternity.

The obedient soul regards not the person who commands her, but God, by whose power she is commanded.

We must not be surprised at the difficulties we experience in the acquisition of perfect submission, for what can be had that is precious without trouble?

The devil cares not for macerations of the body, provided you do your own will ; he fears not austerity, but obedience.

A fast performed by one's own will weakens the flesh, and strengthens self-love and self-judgment; and destroying the sin of the body, creates it in the heart with a vain self-esteem.

One should come to religion only to be conducted to perfection by the most efficacious means, which are those that he himself has not chosen.

The true servant of God executes faithfully to-day what is desired of her ; to-morrow she will do the same ; and thus she is always equally disposed, without being troubled at any thing.

Obedience is the dear virtue of Jesus Christ, in which, by which, and for which, he condescended to give his life.

Open then your heart, my dear sister, says St. Ambrose, and let him enter, by the absolute empire which he has over hearts; but he will not have you use violence; constraint displeases him; he loves the freedom of a heart that gives itself to his service with an entire liberty.

CHAPTER X.

Of the prayer which God communicates to some chosen souls, and some instructions on the subject by the servant of God, St. Francis de Sales.

The prayer of the just, says St. Augustin, is the key of Paradise; it ascends to heaven, and mercy descends to the earth. St. Chrysostom remarks, that the prayer of the prophet Elias shut up the heavens, as it were with a key, to hinder the earth from receiving their influence, and after a time opened them again to cause the richest treasures of fertility to flow into the bosom

of the earth, which a long drought had rendered barren. St. Peter Chrysologus had no less an opinion of it, when he said that prayer rendered Moses as powerful as a God, giving him an absolute empire over the elements. But it appears that the great servant of God, St. Francis de Sales, wishes to carry the effects of prayer even to the heart of God. He says that it unites the soul to her God in so close a union, that it is almost impossible for any thing to separate these blessed lovers.

He thus expressed his ideas when instructing some souls who lived under his holy direction: "My soul melted with joy, says the spouse in the canticles, when my beloved spoke to me ; it is, says he, the greatest benefit for you ; it is your particular inheritance. I mean the faithful and amorous presence of your divine spouse, which produces in your hearts a union with him so intimate, so naked, so simple, so sweet, and so perfect, that nothing can be added to it ; and it is this which forms your prayer, and which those experience whose hearts are touched in a lively man-

ner by his celestial love ; forgetting every thing else, they are capable of being filled and occupied with this faithful friend, their divine all, and of receiving lights to discern his holy will, with strength to embrace whatever is most agreeable to him in the practice of solid virtues.

This amorous and naked simplicity renders you, in some manner, conformable to the most pure and simple spirit of the Divine Majesty ; and this most faithful and watchful abnegation fastens you to the cross with Jesus Christ.

Happy those who faithfully follow this way, which is to love and suffer, simply abandoning themselves to the will of divine Providence, as a child in the arms of its mother, seeking God by a pure and familiar conversation with his bounty, without listening to the industries of the human mind, which cause us to walk in our own ways, rather than in those of God ; for when it pleases him to operate in a soul, he renders her wise in a short time, impressing her with the truths which he wishes her to know, with lights so sublime that she

becomes more enlightened than if she had been taught by many discourses and considerations. This manner is very secret ; nothing is said between God and the soul, except heart to heart, by a communication unknown to all but those who practice it ; they speak not only by the tongue, but by the eyes, by sighs, and by the countenance ; silence holds the place of speech ; the sacred Lover opens the heart and pours into it his sweetnesses so that the soul, filled with love, exclaims : “ I have found him whom I love, I hold him fast, and will not quit him ; ” and melting with joy, flows, as it were, into the Divinity, not only uniting, but even incorporating herself with it ; and thus dying to herself, she has no other life than one with her Beloved, who collects all the powers of her soul into the bosom of his sweetness, pressing her on his sacred breast and making her taste the milk of his suavity, which causes her generously to exclaim : “ Yes Lord I am all thine without reserve.” Ah ! draw me more and more into thy sacred heart, consume me, with thy love, and let me remain for ever absorbed in thy un-

speakable sweetness." But only pure and detached souls can usefully make this prayer, and we must not attempt it of ourselves, nor must we seek curiosities, elevations, suspensions, and supereminences, which are more proper to excite the admiration of others, than to sanctify our hearts, and which are contrary to that spirit of lowliness and littleness which your institute professes, and which desires that your lives be hidden with Jesus Christ in God. It is to the garden of holy prayer, that the divine Lover invites his faithful spouses. I have gathered, says he, my myrrh and my perfumes, joining suffering to sufferings, merits to merits, treasures to treasures, to enrich them. I have eaten my honeycomb with my honey, living in them my new life. "I mingle my wine with the milk of my consolations, to rejoice and inebriate them with my presence." This holy inebriation transforms us in such a manner, that we live more in God than in ourselves; placing him on our heart as a standard of love under which all our affections range themselves, and on our arm as

a sword of dilection, with which we perform exploits of virtue ; these will enable us to lead a supernatural life, elevated above the senses, and which causes us to say, in imitation of our Beloved, who never lost the beatific vision either on the cross or elsewhere : “ I am in repose, having remitted all my cares into the hands of God, but my heart watches over all my actions for the love of him.”

Oh ! holy inebriation, which in the sacred commerce of prayer transports a soul into the cellars of divine love, how desirable thou art ! since thou art the chaste delight, the treasure and solid joy of a pure and faithful heart ! “ Drink and be inebriated, my beloved,” says the Spouse in the canticles ; but with that pure inebriation which, according to St. Ambrose, produces sobriety and sanctity, not debauchery ; and which inspires joy, or, as St. Bernard observes, plunges a soul into the ocean of truth, and not in the vapors of a beverage that only delights the senses ; which makes an innocent heart feel the chaste raptures of her God, whom alone she loves and not

the heat of a wine that obscures reason and destroys the life of grace.

CHAPTER XI.

Other instructions concerning the practice of prayer.

Prayer has forces which triumph over those of nature, and which overcome the resistance of all the elements, since, in the language of St. Chrysologus, we may say that it enters into partnership with the almighty power of a God. Moses, for the glory of his triumphs, made use of the principal works of the universe by the strength of prayer, as the great Bishop of Ravenna remarks; and the Bishop of Geneva speaks of it in these terms: Think not, my daughters, that the practice of prayer is a work of the human mind; it is a particular gift of the Holy-Ghost, who elevates the powers of the soul far above

their natural strength, to unite them to God by sentiments and communications which all the discourse and wisdom of men could never effect without him. The ways by which he conducts the saints in this exercise, (which is the most divine employment of a reasonable creature,) are wonderful in their diversity, and they should all be respected, since they conduct to God, and under the guidance of a God, but we must not endeavor to follow them all, nor even make choice of any of ourselves ; the essential point is to recognize the grace imparted to us, and to be faithful to it.

Now to tell you in few words what I have known by long experience, regarding the manner or kind of prayer which is the most common among you and the most conformable to your spirit, it appears to me that God conducts almost all the daughters of the Visitation to the prayer of a simple unity, an unique simplicity of attention to his presence, and an entire abandonment of themselves to his holy will and to the care of his Divine Providence, which I call the prayer of a simple remission of

the soul in God, which is so profitable and salutary for you, that, I assure you, it comprehends all that you could wish to glorify God according to the spirit of your institute.

For I have frequently told you, and I cannot repeat it too often, you must seek God in the simplicity of your hearts, treating of the mysteries of God with God himself by a familiar conversation with his divine bounty, accompanied with a great respect for his holy presence. This, however, should not prevent those who are only commencing a religious life, and who have not as yet acquired a great facility in conversing with God, from making use of considerations to engrave on their minds the truths of faith, of which they have but faint ideas in the beginning.

Without doubt it is important that they make these considerations, and occupy their minds sweetly on the life and sufferings of Jesus Christ, to draw thence a holy imitation, gradually accustoming themselves to treat with him heart to heart, not by reasoning and argument, but by a simple atten-

tion to what he performs in the mystery which they are considering, and by interior words of love, abandonment, compunction, resignation, &c. according to the attraction they feel, without violence, effort, or noise, as if they wished to insinuate them gently into the sacred heart of this divine Spouse, so as to be heard by him alone. But care must be taken that, as they advance in prayer, they simplify these acts more and more, entertaining themselves affectionately with God and withdrawing as much as possible from sensible objects to unite themselves more closely to him, and to become more capable of receiving the impressions of his Holy Spirit. And as it often happens that God exercises souls whom he prepares and disposes to an excellent degree of prayer, by great aridities and desolations of mind, which continue as long as his Infinite Wisdom judges proper, they must not be astonished to find themselves in this state, or cease to make interior acts, which, though formed without delight or sentiment, will not be without profit. They should hold it for a certain maxim, that the prayer of

patience and submission to the good pleasure of God, is not less agreeable to his bounty than that of the sweetest enjoyment; they have only to keep themselves simply in his presence, as a slave before his Lord, or as a child at the feet of its father, contenting themselves with producing, from time to time, acts of confidence, love, fidelity, and, above all, of a generous desire of correcting their defects, without noticing whether these interior acts are according to their taste or not, provided they are pleasing and acceptable to God. Now if they will remain constant in this practice, and be faithful in the exercise of virtue, which is the true fruit of a good prayer, they may rest assured that they will not remain there; for the prayer of all the daughters of the Visitation, as I have already said, generally terminates in this unique simplicity and repose in the presence of God: and though there are many degrees in this state, and some possess it in a more eminent manner than others, yet they all attain it almost without perceiving it until they have arrived there. The important

point consists in being faithful to the attraction of the Holy Spirit, not anticipating it, but waiting with humility for the blessed moment which our Lord has destined to introduce you into this happiness.

Confide in God, my dear daughters ; suffer yourselves to be governed by him, and be assured that whatever he permits is most advantageous for you. When once you will have entered this sweet repose, (whilst others who have the happiness of being admitted to the table of the Son of God are employed in tasting the various dishes which are served up,) he will permit you to rest on his sacred breast by a simple confidence, and an amorous remission of your affections, desires, and of all that you are or possess. Never abandon this kind of prayer, whatever may be said to you, for it is so truly yours, that if any among you be induced to quit it, they appear to leave their centre, losing their liberty of spirit, and finding themselves in a certain constraint which deprives them of peace, and greatly retards their advancement in perfection.

Finally, as this state is extremely elevated, it demands of you great perfection ; I mean, an extreme dependence on the will of God, a profound submission to his decrees, and a most rare and exquisite purity of heart. In all things you should pay a simple attention to the will and good pleasure of God, without reflecting on the past, present, or future ; without seeing, or wishing to see, what you have to do, or the conduct of others towards you. You should, if possible, forget all things, even yourselves, to remember only God, and to keep yourselves united to his bounty, in all that happens to you from moment to moment, and this very simply, equally receiving and cherishing all the effects of his grace in you ; sacrificing and abandoning yourselves without reserve to the mercy of his love ; uniting yourselves to his holy will in the supreme point of your mind, and happily, losing yourselves in him, if I may say so, to find all in him alone, who is your only and sovereign good. Happy the soul who will persevere in this holy exercise with an inviolable fidelity, not-

withstanding all the difficulties and obstacles which oppose her progress in virtue, for she will infallibly find peace in the midst of war, rest in labor, Jesus in the cross, and in her own annihilation this only good, which constitutes the sovereign beatitude of all the saints.

In fine, prayer opens the treasures of heaven, disposes of its riches, disarms its just indignation, and makes its way to the throne of God. He who created Moses, says St. Bernard, asked leave of him to strike his enemies : You might say that the rod of a God justly irritated, depended on that of his creature. A Jonas in the whale's belly, the three children in the fiery furnace, a Daniel in the lions' den, a thief on the cross, by the means of prayer, says St. Jerome, find their conquests in the midst of pains. Prayer obtains more from God than it asks. Anna wished for a son, and she obtained a prophet: Zachary desired only the use of his speech, after he had become dumb, and God gave him a tongue capable of singing his praises in canticles, and of pronouncing the oracles of heaven;

a prodigal desired only the bread of a mercenary, and he found the caresses of a father, and the delights of an agreeable festival. Jacob is satisfied that his Joseph lives, and God shows him his son amid the grandeurs of an Egyptian court, and in the pomp of sovereign authority ; because, as St. Chrysostom observes, the liberality of a God far surpasses all that our prayers are capable of demanding. This is the happy portion of the holy order of the religious of the Visitation. Humility forms the precious character of this Institute, and it is humility that constitutes the vehicle of prayer. The prayer of the humble, says Ecclesiasticus, penetrates the clouds, attracts the abundant graces of God on the daughters of the holy Bishop of Geneva, and imparts to them the advantage of making great progress in the practice of prayer.

Reflections and Maxims of St. Francis de Sales, on the same subject.

Blessed is the soul who in prayer follows the attractions of God, and faithfully obeys the guidance of his divine Spirit.

True sweetness is found in nourishing the heart with the love of God and in conversing with him, without whom our hearts are without life, and our lives without happiness.

The more tranquil and simple our prayer is, being made in the very point of the mind, the more fruitful it is.

The true repose of the soul in prayer is to see God, to desire God, and to taste God.

The grace of prayer is not acquired by any effort of the mind, but by a most humble and faithful perseverance.

God does not demand splendor, but ardor of prayer, says St. Bernard ; if prayer be languishing, its progress is retarded ; but if animated with fervor and flames of love, it penetrates heaven, and never returns empty handed, but always loaded with spoils, palms, and conquests.

AN EPISTLE

OF THE

Venerable Mother de Chantal to the Reverend Father Don John of St. Francis, of the order of mendicant Friars, wherein she admirably describes the spirit of her blessed Father St. Francis de Sales.

Alas! Reverend Father, you command me to do a thing which is far above my capacity; God, however, has given me a greater knowledge of my Reverend Father than my unworthiness deserves, and particularly since his death he has favored me with it; for while the object was present, the admiration and satisfaction which I felt, dazzled me a little; at least, it appears so to me. But I confess with all simplicity to your paternal heart, that I am incapable of expressing myself on the subject; nevertheless in obedience to your Reverence, and in consideration of the love and respect which I owe the authority by which you command me, I proceed in all simplicity to write in the presence of God what has come to my knowledge concerning him. In the first place, my dearest

Father, I will tell you that I discovered in our amiable Saint, the gift of a most perfect faith, which was accompanied with great light and certainty, joined to an extreme pleasure and suavity ; he has made many admirable discourses to me on this subject, and he once told me that God had favored him with so much light and knowledge to penetrate the mysteries of our holy faith, that he thought he was well possessed of the meaning and intention of the Church with regard to what she teaches her children. His life and works render sufficient testimony of this. God had shed in the centre of this most holy soul, or to use his own expression, in the very point or summit of his mind, so superior a light, that with one single glance he saw the truths of faith and their excellence, which caused him great ardor, ecstasies and transports, and he submitted to the truths proposed to him by a simple acquiescence and sentiment of his will.

He called the place in which these lights were diffused, the sanctuary of God, into which nothing can enter, except the soul

alone with her God : this was the place of his retreat, and his most ordinary residence: notwithstanding his continual exterior occupations, he kept his mind as much as possible in this interior solitude. I never saw this blessed Father aspire or breathe except with the sole desire of living according to the truths of faith and the rules of the gospel: this is manifest in his memoirs. He said that the best manner of serving God, is to follow him in the very point of the soul, with no other support or consolation, sentiment or light, than that of simple and naked faith; therefore he loved interior desolations, aridities and abandonments. He told me once that he did not take notice whether he was in consolation or desolation, that when our Lord imparted good sentiments to him, he received them with simplicity, and when they were not given he did not think of it. But he was ordinarily favored with great interior sweetness, and this was frequently observed in him; he formed good thoughts of every thing, turning all to the profit of his soul. But he received these lights espe-

cially while preparing his sermons, which he generally did walking, and he told me that he made a prayer of his study, and came from it very much enlightened and inflamed. Some years ago he told me he felt no sensible pleasure in prayer, and that what God operated in him, was by lights and insensible effects, which he infused into the intellectual part of his soul, the inferior part having no share therein. Commonly these were divine emanations and sentiments of the most simple unity, which he received simply with a most profound reverence and humility ; for his method was to keep himself very humble, little and lowly, in the presence of God, with a singular respect and confidence, as a child of love. He wrote to me often, and desired me when I should see him, to ask him what God had communicated to him in prayer, and when I did so, he answered me thus : "These are things so nice, so simple, and so delicate, that we cannot tell them when they have passed ; the effects alone remain in the soul."

Several years before his death he scarcely had any time for mental prayer on account of a multiplicity of affairs, and one day I asked him if he had made it. "No," said he, but I have done that which is as well," meaning, that he kept himself always united with God; and he said that, in this mortal life, we must make a prayer of our work and actions; and truly he did so. From what has already been said, it is easy to imagine that this great Saint was not satisfied with the enjoyment of the delicious union of his soul with God only during prayer; no, certainly, for he loved equally the divine will on all occasions; and truly I think that, during the last years of his precious life, he attained so great a purity that he neither desired, saw, nor loved, but God alone in all things.

He was often seen entirely absorbed in him, and he said there was nothing in the world which could give him any satisfaction but God; so that we may truly say, it was no longer he who lived, but Jesus Christ who lived in him. This general love of the will of God was so much the more

pure and excellent, as this holy soul was not liable to change or to be deceived, on account of the superior light which God diffused in his soul, by means of which he saw the first motions of self-love, and faithfully stifled them to unite himself more intimately to him. He told me sometimes that in the midst of his greatest afflictions, he felt a hundred times more sweetness than usual; for by means of this intimate union, the most bitter things were rendered savory to him. But if your Reverence desires to see clearly the state of his most pure soul on this point, be pleased to read the three or four last chapters in the ninth book of the Treatise on the Love of God. He animated all his actions with the sole motive of pleasing God: and truly, as he says in that sacred book, he asked for nothing, either in heaven or on earth, except to see the will of God accomplished. Not unfrequently did he pronounce these words of David, with an ecstatic fervor: "Oh Lord! what is there for me in heaven, and what could I desire on earth, except thyself; thou art my portion and inheritance

for ever." All that was not God, was nothing to him. From this perfect union proceeded those eminent virtues and that universal indifference which every one commonly observed in him; and I cannot read those chapters in the Treatise on the Love of God, where he treats of this subject, without discerning that he practiced, when occasions were offered, this lesson so little known and yet so excellent: "Ask nothing, desire nothing, refuse nothing;" which could only proceed from a soul entirely indifferent and dead to itself. His equality of mind was inexpressible; for on no occasion was it ever observed to be altered, notwithstanding the rude treatment he sometimes met with; but of this his memoirs bear sufficient testimony. This equality was not the result of indifference and insensibility; on the contrary, his feelings were most delicate and lively, particularly when he saw God offended and his neighbor oppressed. On these occasions he was seen to be silent, and to withdraw himself in God, remaining there in composure; not however omitting to ap-

ply a prompt remedy to the evil, for he was the refuge, the succor, and the support of all. Was not the peace of his heart divine and altogether unchangeable, being established in a perfect mortification of his passions, and in a total abandonment of his soul into the hands of God? Once when at Lyons, he said to me: "What is there that could disturb my peace? I assure you that though every thing should be in confusion, I would not be troubled, for what is the whole world in comparison with the peace of my heart." It appears to me that this stability proceeded from his attentive and lively faith, for he considered all events, great and small, as coming from divine Providence, in whom he reposed with more tranquillity than an only child on the bosom of its mother. He told me that our Lord had taught him this lesson from his youth, and that were he to be born again, he would condemn human prudence more than ever, and would leave himself entirely to the guidance of Almighty God; he had very great lights on this subject, and ardently conducted to it those souls whom

he counseled and governed. With regard to the affairs which he undertook, and which God committed to his care, he always managed and conducted them under the shelter of this supreme government, and never was he more assured of success, or more content amid difficulties, than when he had no other support. When, according to human prudence, he foresaw that it was impossible for him to execute a design, which God had committed to him, his confidence was so firm that nothing was able to lessen it, and this caused him to live without any anxiety. I observed it when he had determined to form our congregation ; he said, "I see no means for that establishment, but I am confident that God will effect it." This was verified within a much shorter time than he had imagined. Many years ago he was assailed with a violent emotion which exercised him very much, and he wrote to me, saying : "I am very much tormented : it seems to me that I have not sufficient strength to resist, and that were the occasion to present itself, I should yield ; however, the weaker I feel

the more confidence I place in God, and I am sure that were these objects present, I should be invested with virtue and strength from him, and devour my enemies as lambskins." Our Saint was not exempt from the sentiments and emotions of the passions, nor did he wish that any one should desire to be freed from them: he made no account of them except to subdue them, in which he delighted; he said that they helped us to practice the most excellent virtues and to establish them solidly in the soul: but truly he had so absolute an authority over his passions, that they obeyed him as slaves; and towards the end of his life he appeared to have none. My dear Father, he was the most hardy, generous, and powerful soul, in supporting charges and labors, and in executing those enterprises with which God inspired him; he was never discouraged; and he said that, when our Lord commits an affair to us, we must not abandon it, but be courageous in overcoming every difficulty. Certainly, my dear Father, it required great strength of mind to persevere in virtue as our Saint did. Was he

ever seen to neglect a single point of modesty? When was he ever known to betray the least impatience or want of meekness towards his neighbor?

His heart was perfectly innocent, entirely free from all malice and bitterness; his spirit meek, humble, gracious, and affable. To this was added an excellence and solidity of prudence and wisdom, both natural and supernatural, that God had infused into his mind, which was one of the most clear, comprehensive, and enlightened.— Truly our Lord seemed to have forgotten nothing to perfect this work, which his all powerful and merciful hand had formed. In fine, the divine bounty had instilled into this holy soul a most perfect charity; and as charity (according to his own observation) never enters the soul without attracting all other virtues, so they were all placed and arranged in his heart in a most admirable order; each held there the rank and authority which belonged to it; none undertook any thing without the concurrence of the whole; for he clearly saw what was proper to each one and its de-

gree of perfection, and all produced there acts as occasions presented themselves, in proportion as charity urged him, and this gently, without show. He never appeared mysterious, nor performed such actions as might serve to excite the admiration of those who only regard the exterior appearance: there was no singularity in his behavior, nor any of those showy virtues which dazzle the eyes of the beholder and are applauded by the vulgar. He kept himself in the common train, but in a manner so divine and celestial that, it seems to me, nothing in his life was more admirable. When he prayed, recited the office, or celebrated the divine Sacrifice, he appeared like an angel, on account of the great splendor that shone on his countenance; nothing affected was observed in his motions; he was scarcely ever seen to raise or shut his eyes, but he kept them modestly cast down, and made no other movements than those which were necessary; and the profound interior tranquillity that he enjoyed, was truly visible in his sweet, grave and peaceful countenance.

Whoever witnessed him in the performance of his actions, was infallibly touched, and particularly during the time of the holy consecration, for then he assumed a new splendor, which has been remarked thousands of times. He had a special love for the most adorable Sacrament; it was his life and only strength. Oh God! what ardent and tender devotion he had when he carried it during the processions. You might have beheld him as a luminous cherub. When near this divine Sacrament he appeared filled with inexpressible ardor; but this, as well as his incomparable devotion to the Mother of God, has been spoken of elsewhere, and therefore I will not repeat it here. Oh Jesus! how admirable an order was there in his holy soul—every thing was so well regulated, so calm; and he was so singularly enlightened by God, that he saw the very least of his inclinations; he possessed great penetration in what regarded the perfection of the spirit, discerning its most delicate and refined operations. This pure soul, possessing so much love and zeal, could never suffer the

smallest voluntary imperfection ; not that he did not commit some, but it was through surprise and infirmity ; if he had an attachment to any thing, how small soever it might have been, I am ignorant of it : on the contrary our meek and humble Saint was purer than the sun and fairer than the snow in his actions and resolutions. In fine, he was purity, humility, simplicity, and unity of spirit with his God : it was delightful to hear him speak of God and perfection ; he used terms so correct and intelligible, that he made others clearly discern the most delicate and hidden things of the spiritual life.

He was not possessed of so penetrating a light for himself alone ; every one who has seen and known him, can bear testimony that God had communicated to him a special gift for the conduct of souls, and that he governed them with a dexterity quite celestial : he penetrated the depth of hearts, and saw clearly their condition, and by what impulse they were actuated ; and every one was convinced of his incomparable charity for souls, and that it was his de-

light to labor for them : he was indefatigable in his exertions until he restored them to peace, and put them in the way of salvation. With regard to those sinners whom he wished to convert, and whom he observed to be as yet weak, what did he omit doing for them? He made himself a sinner with them, and so sensibly participated in their afflictions, that no one could conceal any thing from him. Now, in my opinion, it seems that a zeal for the salvation of souls was the predominant virtue of our beloved Father ; for it may be said, that he left the service of God for that of his neighbor. Good God ! what tenderness, what forbearance, what mildness, what labor ! He consumed his life in their service. I cannot omit mentioning in this place, a thing which is very remarkable ; our Lord had truly regulated the charity of this holy soul ; for among the many souls whom he particularly loved, (and they were an infinite number,) he had a different degree of love for each of them ; he loved all purely and perfectly, according to their rank, but not all equal-

ly; he remarked in every one what he thought most estimable, and gave it the place in his dilection according to its measure of grace. He had an incomparable respect for his neighbor, because he considered God in him, and he in God. As to his dignity, what honor and respect did he not bear it? His humility did not prevent him exercising the gravity, modesty, and reverence due to his quality of Bishop.

My God! dare I say it? it seems to me that my beloved Father was a living image in which the Son of God, our Lord, was represented; for really the ardor and economy of this holy soul were entirely supernatural. I am not alone in this sentiment; many persons have told me that, when they beheld this blessed man, they thought they saw our Lord on earth.

I am, Reverend Father, your most humble, obediënt, and unworthy daughter, and servant in our Lord.

Sister JANE FRANCIS FREMIOT,
Of the Visitation of the B. V. M.—

From our Monastery of Annecy.

A P P R O B A T I O N .

I, the undersigned, Priest and Doctor in Theology, of the Faculty of Paris, Grand Vicar and Official of Rouen, have read the book entitled, "*An abridgment of the interior Spirit of the daughters of the Visitation of the B. V. Mary,*" in which I have observed nothing contrary to faith and the rules of a true and solid piety. Signed at Rouen, this first day of June, one thousand six hundred and eighty-six.

CLEMENT.

*The spirit of the religious Sisters of the
Visitation of the blessed Virgin Mary.*

*Extracts from the writings of St. Francis de Sales,
and those of Mother de Chantal.*

CHAPTER I.

LIVE † JESUS.

*How a religious of the Visitation should
regard herself.*

A Daughter of the Visitation is a person who withdraws herself from the embarrassments of the world to live entirely to God ; who abandons it to unite herself perfectly to Jesus Christ, by the mortification of her exterior senses, and still more by that of her interior passion ; to recall and reunite all her powers, dissipated by the multitude of objects, which the world formerly presented her, to employ them in future only in the service of her celestial Spouse.

CHAPTER II.

Her intention in retiring from the world.

At her entrance into the monastery she bade adieu to all things, that she might devote herself entirely to God, seeking, in perfect simplicity of heart, a sovereign and simple unity with her Lord and her God.

CHAPTER III.

Her only affair.

She renounced the world to forget it, and to be no longer remembered by it, that nothing might divert her from her only affair, which is to tend to the perfection of divine love.

CHAPTER IV.

The obligations of her vows.

The engagement of her vows imposes on her a particular obligation to observe them with all the exactitude and sanctity prescribed by the constitutions; so that her chastity be sovereignly pure, her obedience without reserve, and founded on a

perfect abnegation of her own will, and her poverty entire, by an interior as well as exterior detachment from all things.

CHAPTER V.

With what dispositions she should make her profession, and whom she ought to propose to herself as her model therein.

Her profession should be a sacrifice of holocaust, by the entire and perfect immolation which she should make of herself to the majesty of God ; and she ought to take for her model the oblation, which the Apostles made of themselves to God, by a perfect renunciation of all earthly things ; the ardent charity with which the martyrs sacrificed their lives, and that which has induced so many anchorets and holy virgins to consecrate themselves to the love and service of Jesus Christ.

CHAPTER VI.

How far her fervor and zeal should extend.

She should have those great examples constantly before her, to sustain her fidelity-

ty and animate her fervor and zeal, which ought to be so ardent and so pure, that were it possible to surpass what the greatest saints have done, and did she know a more perfect manner of uniting herself to Jesus Christ, she should believe herself obliged to embrace it.

CHAPTER VII.

She should put no bounds to the perfection proposed to her.

St. Francis de Sales did not wish to limit the perfection which he proposed to his daughters; he desired that a religious of the Visitation should imitate even the holy angels, living only in God and for God, by a full and entire consecration of her being and of all the powers of her soul to the Divine Majesty; so that God may reign sovereignly and perfectly over her, and that she may be entirely subjected and devoted to him.

CHAPTER VIII.

What the quality of a daughter of the Blessed Virgin demands.

He desired that as a daughter of our blessed Lady, she should belong to God, as she did, to accomplish all his wills ; that she should quit all, and renounce every thing, even herself, by a perfect abandonment to divine Providence, to be able to say like the blessed Virgin, I am the servant of the Lord ; and to be so entirely, constantly and perpetually.

CHAPTER IX.

To what the example of Jesus Christ crucified should lead her.

Our amiable Father wished that she should consider herself all her life as being by her profession established on Mount Calvary for the service of Jesus crucified ; and that always having this divine model before her eyes she may continually crucify her senses, passions, inclinations, aversions and humors ; that thus her heart may no longer have any motion that does not

tend to unite her intimately to Jesus Christ, as this divine Saviour united himself to his Father, dying on the cross naked and destitute of all. A religious of the Visitation should never lose sight of him in this condition ; and should no longer allow herself the liberty of using her heart, her eyes or her tongue, but for the service and by the impulse of the love of this crucified Spouse.

CHAPTER X.

How far her spirit of mortification should extend.

She is no longer permitted to follow the desires or inclinations of nature, since she should not live or breathe but for God ; all in her should be holy, and this interior disposition ought to appear in her exterior, in her words and actions, and she must be so perfectly detached from all that is earthly that she even lose all relish and eagerness for what the necessities of life oblige her to use ; and that through choice she be always ready to do without them, were it

possible, even so far that if these succors failed her, she should then consider herself as a true religious, who from the disposition of her heart, ought to cherish the want even of things that are necessary, and support it without complaint or murmur, regarding it as the true practice of evangelical poverty, which is an incomparable treasure, and which abandons all cares of tomorrow to divine Providence, who should be her only resource, and in whom a true daughter of the beloved Virgin should entirely confide.

CHAPTER XI.

Her love and affection for poverty.

She must then love all that is poor, and let nothing appear either in herself, in her habits, or in any thing that is for her use, which savors not of simplicity and contempt of the world ; not procuring gildings and other similar ornaments, even in those parts of the house, that are destined to excite piety, since if she has true devotion,

she will be much more touched by modesty and simplicity than by all that would betray, in the least, the luxury and pomp of the world.

CHAPTER XII.

What should be her simplicity and humility.

A good religious has nothing so much to heart as this holy simplicity ; and she constantly remembers that all the glory of a daughter of the Visitation consists in having none, and all her grandeur in keeping herself in her littleness, since it is ordained her by an express rule to perform all her actions in the spirit of humility, but of a humility sincere and profound, which excludes all research of self ; this is the particular character of a daughter of the Visitation, and it is on this foundation St. Francis de Sales declares that she is called to the highest perfection that we can attain here below ; because her institute engages her to the practice of the most profound humility and the most perfect annihilation.

CHAPTER XIII.

In what she ought more particularly to practice humility.

Her principal care should be to abase and humble herself in every thing, without desiring to appear or excel, either in what relates to herself in particular or in what refers to the house in general ; keeping herself hidden in peace under the shade of her own abjection and baseness, wishing to appear but in this, or rather not wishing even to appear herein ; finding her repose and happiness in the annihilation of herself ; not forgetting that she is of the last order in the church, and that being the least and the most useless servant in the house of God, she should love to be regarded and treated conformably to what she is in effect. In fine, there must be nothing in a daughter of the Visitation that bears not the character of self-annihilation ; since this is her true spirit, and the life and soul of her order.

CHAPTER XIV.

How she ought to regard every thing that tends to self annihilation.

She should keep herself continually in this true and sincere humility of heart ; and when the world despises her, she should receive this contempt as a thing most suitable to her state, and as a precious pledge of God's love towards her ; since he always regards, with a favorable eye, her who sincerely desires to be the object of the contempt of men ; humiliation willingly accepted is a most agreeable sacrifice to him.

CHAPTER XV.

What constitutes the humility of a daughter of the Visitation.

Let not a daughter of the Visitation desire to be loved or esteemed by men ; let her regard herself as the least of all, and very far from being pained when others are esteemed and praised, she should sincerely rejoice ; let her desire only the common good, and not her particular interest ;

let her yield without constraint to her equals, and even to her inferiors ; and let her even be glad to see herself blamed and what she does disapproved of, sincerely condemning it herself, since there is always too much imperfection in all that we do ; loving to be regarded as useless in the monastery, and to be employed therein only in things that are vile, low, and humiliating.

CHAPTER XVI.

How she ought to receive advice and corrections.

This humble sentiment of herself should prevent her ever excusing herself either in great or small faults, and make her receive in good part the admonitions which are given her, and rejoice when accused not only of her defects, but also of things of which she does not feel herself guilty ; suffering it with a good heart, in imitation of Jesus Christ in the opprobriums and ignominies which he endured, and entering into the spirit of that profound humili-

ty, which made him say by the mouth of the Prophet, "I am a worm and no man, the reproach of men and the outcast of the people." In imitation of this great example, should not a religious seek to abase herself continually, and ought not her only study be humility and self-annihilation ?

CHAPTER XVII.

Whence proceeds the practice of the accusation of faults.

This spirit of annihilation was the reason why St. Francis de Sales established in his order the daily practice of the accusation of the faults and defects of his daughters, which ought to be inviolably observed : but which would be only illusion and hypocrisy, if each sister were not sincerely disposed to receive corrections, confusions, humiliations and other painful things, not by way of trials or tribulations sent by God, but as chastisements due on account of her sins, and as remedies necessary to cure her pride. Far be it from them to desire, either in this or in any

other thing, those privileges which in some other orders are given to the ancient, and to which St. Francis de Sales had so great an aversion, that he would not have any rank among the religious of his congregation except that which falls to them by lot, and which changes every year, as well as every thing they use, that they may be attached to God alone.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Her attention to the presence of God, and what her exterior deportment should be.

This detachment from all things is a wonderful help to keep her continually in the presence of God, and this practice should be one of the principal cares of a daughter of the Visitation. This perpetual attention to the eternal rule of all good, ought to regulate not only her mind and heart, but also her exterior, which should be humble, gentle, and modest, accompanied with a gravity becoming the spouses of Jesus Christ, but without affectation ; on

the contrary, she should preserve in all her actions a great simplicity, which excludes every thing like show and the affected manners of the children of the world. This modesty must appear even in the tone of her voice, which should not be loud or rude, and her looks ought to be regulated by a certain timidity, which induces her to keep her eyes modestly cast down as much as possible.

CHAPTER XIX.

How exact her observance of silence should be, and the fruit she should draw from it.

THE EFFECTS OF SILENCE.

Another great help to keep one's self in the presence of God, is the practice of silence, in which a religious of the Visitation ought to be very exact, remembering that it was instituted, not only to avoid the faults occasioned by speaking, but also to preserve recollection by the retrenchment of useless thoughts, which cause dissipation, and render her unfit for

conversing with her divine Spouse, which she ought to do continually, to gain new strength and become more and more capable of laboring unceasingly in his divine service. A religious therefore should have a particular affection for silence, and be very careful in the observance of it; on account of the great advantages which she may thence draw. It has always been strongly recommended by the founders of religious orders, of which it is the ornament and support. It is the guardian of the heart and produces the spirit of prayer. In short its utility is so great, that to reform a monastery it is sufficient to establish silence therein; and on the contrary, to destroy regularity, you have but to neglect the observance of silence.

CHAPTER XX.

In what disposition a daughter of the Visitation should be with regard to the parlor, and how she should conduct herself there.

This love of silence should cause a daughter of the Visitation to frequent the

parlor as little as she can, and never to go thither except when necessary. When there she ought to remain as short a time as possible, and be more particular in retrenching all useless words than in any other place. Let her also avoid long conversations, even with them that are spiritual, because many superfluous and useless words glide into them, which are always dangerous, and the least evil occasioned thereby is a loss of time.

CHAPTER XXI.

Silence is to be observed even by the Superior.

This retrenchment of all useless discourse and unprofitable words is so important and so expressly recommended, that though the superior cannot avoid speaking more than the other sisters, yet she ought to serve them as a model on this point as well as on every other : and it is not permitted that any sister should speak to her during the hours of silence, except for necessary purposes, for which the sisters can

have recourse to her at all times. Each one must regard and love her as a mother, and as the interpreter of the will of God in her regard.

CHAPTER XXII.

The disposition of a daughter of the Visitation towards her superior.

This disposition of a religious for her superior is the only thing that can animate and sustain obedience, which without it would be very imperfect and defective: Wherefore a daughter of the Visitation should consider that it is God himself whom she obeys in the person of her superior.

CHAPTER XXIII.

What should be her obedience, and what conditions it should have.

Obedience, to be perfect, requires the following conditions. We must obey *carefully*, without forgetting or neglecting what will have been commanded. We must obey *promptly*, without any kind

of delay or hesitation. We must obey *simply*, without examining the reason of the command and without listening to any contrary objections. We must obey *faithfully*, without any self-seeking in what we do through obedience.

We must obey *from the bottom of our heart*, by a sincere submission of our judgment and will to that of our superior. In fine, as it is God whom we regard in them who have authority over us, we should obey *equally* any superior, since they are all the interpreters of the will of God, which should constitute the entire pleasure and happiness of a true religious, because the accomplishment of this ever adorable will comprises all christian perfection. A true daughter of the Visitation ought then willingly to undertake and suffer every thing at the least intimation of obedience.

By this means, she will enter into the sentiment of that spiritual infancy so much recommended by our Lord, which is the surest road to heaven, and the source and support of tranquillity of mind.

CHAPTER XXIV.

How far the confidence of a daughter of the Visitation in her Superior should extend.

It is not enough for a daughter of the Visitation to obey her superior ; she must also have for her all candor and confidence, in making known the dispositions of her heart with perfect sincerity and simplicity, as well as in receiving her advice with submission and docility. In recompense for our fidelity in considering God in our superior, and in paying her the obedience which has just been described, he will manifest himself through her advice ; she will be in this light as the organ of the holy Spirit. Therefore a daughter of the Visitation should not be less faithful in opening her heart to her superior, than in obeying her ; and this practice is so important for the preservation of the spirit of the institute, that it will only be maintained in proportion to the fidelity with which this rule will be observed.

CHAPTER XXV.

What should be the motive of this candor and confidence.

She ought to bear in mind that this practice was not established merely that she might find consolation therein ; but also to strengthen her in virtue and to exercise her in humility. A true religious should receive the advice and remonstrance of her superior as suitable remedies for the cure of her spiritual maladies, and as necessary to preserve her from them for the future ; being persuaded that when she is either mortified or reprimanded, it is a mark of the love which her superior bears her, of the desire she has to preserve in her the true spirit of the institute and to conduct her to the height of religious perfection.

CHAPTER XXVI.

By what means she can most advance towards perfection.

As perfection is the end of all her exercises, her continual care should be to advance towards it by a perfect observance

of her rules, and she should remember that to attain perfection, she must know little, think little, desire little, and speak little, but do and suffer much for God.

CHAPTER XXVII.

What means she should employ to combat and overcome negligence and sloth.

The best means to prevent and overcome all kinds of negligence and sloth, is to keep ourselves continually occupied, as much as our bodily strength will permit. A daughter of the Visitation should never be idle; and even when in the parlor she should have some kind of work.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

How careful she should be to employ her time well, and to avoid amusements and plays.

She who knows the value of time will never lose a moment of it, much less employ it in pastimes and plays; nothing being more unworthy of the sanctity of the religious profession. Even those diver-

sions which seem most innocent to worldly persons, are not becoming a religious of the blessed Virgin ; moreover, they are forbidden by an express rule, which has been confirmed by St. Francis de Sales, who, when consulted on this subject by Mother de Chantal to know whether the sisters might play at dice and checkers, he answered that they must keep to the constitution, which prohibits all kinds of plays. We must then consider them all as absolutely forbidden, as also birds, lap-dogs, and other such animals, which only serve for amusement.

CHAPTER XXIX.

What should constitute all her pleasure and joy.

All her joy should be in God, and her delight should consist in thinking of him and entertaining herself with him ; he ought to be her sovereign desire and her only love, as he is her happiness and her life.

CHAPTER XXX.

How far her forgetfulness and contempt of the world should extend.

Upon this principle, it is not even permitted her, when she is in conversation with seculars, to inquire about the things of the world to which she should be dead, and should she happen to speak of what passes therein, she ought not to consider this fault as light, since she could not commit it but by some return of the heart towards the world, which should be forever abandoned and forgotten by her. Should this defect glide into the generality of the community, or should any particular religious be guilty of it, it must be advertised, that it may be remedied.

CHAPTER XXXI.

How she ought to conduct herself when any secular enters the monastery.

This disposition, in which a true religious should be, with regard to the world and all that appertains to it, requires that

if secular ladies of superior dignity enter the monastery, she should not, on that account, observe less the silence of the heart and tongue, which ought not to be interrupted without an express order of obedience; and amid that which constitutes the lustre and pomp of the world, she should be without any kind of eagerness or emotion, preserving her ordinary tranquillity, without omitting or deferring the least of her exercises; and what is most important on this point, and most advisable, is not to converse on what she may have seen, and to banish it promptly from her mind, since it is only illusion and vanity. Such things are unworthy of occupying her mind and heart.

CHAPTER XXXII.

What should be the subject of her conversation.

Jesus Christ alone ought to be her delight, and the subject of her entertainments; if her silence is interrupted, it should be but to speak of him, of what he has done

and suffered for us, of the virtues which he has taught us, and which have been so excellently practiced by his holy Mother, by the Apostles, and all the Saints.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

What she ought to observe in her ordinary entertainments.

Should she find herself obliged to speak of any other than of God, she should never do it but with regret, and she must at least observe therein all the discretion and circumspection which her state requires. In her conversations she should abstain from all that could wound her neighbor, from every word that is unbecoming and uncivil, refraining from excessive laughter, and avoiding the gestures and manners of worldly persons, as well as every thing that savors of levity ; in fine, from all that is not suitable to a state which obliges her to render her conversation pure and angelic, especially avoiding egotism, since she cannot permit herself that liberty without some motion of pride and self-love insinuating itself therein.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

How she ought to regard herself, after what has been announced to her, at her profession.

A religious of the blessed Virgin should constantly remember that it is no longer permitted her to live humanly, since at her profession it was announced to her that, by her vows, she was dead to the world and to herself, to live no longer but for God.

She then took the cross of Jesus Christ for her portion, and she solemnly protested that she would place therein all her glory, that the world should be crucified to her, and that she would for ever be crucified to the world, to all its sentiments, manners, and customs. From the happy moment that it was declared to her that her life was hidden in God, with Jesus Christ, she contracted an indispensable obligation to live no longer but of the life of this divine Savior, and to suffer nothing to subsist in her that is not conformable to the examples and sentiments of Jesus Christ. In every situation she should be animated with his spirit,

and ever remember the poverty, humility, and simplicity of her profession.

CHAPTER XXXV.

Whereby she ought to supply the austerities which are practiced in other Orders.

It is this that should engage her frequently to confound herself in all the mitigations that her rule gives her, and to consider herself so much the more obliged to love God, and to serve him in spirit and in truth, to compensate for all those exterior means, such as fasts, watchings, and other austerities, practiced by the Saints and Fathers of the desert, whose example she is recommended to have daily before her eyes, and particularly that of Jesus Christ in his most bitter sufferings, that she may learn to mortify and overcome herself, courageously avoiding in her nourishment all that savors in the least of delicacy and sensuality.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

What should be her disposition in sickness.

In her greatest maladies, she should ever regard mediocrity and religious poverty.

not seeking therein meats and remedies of an excessive price, more suitable for great ladies of the world than for a poor religious, who in sickness ought to be patient, meek, and obedient ; indifferent to all that regards her nourishment, reliefs, and remedies ; receiving all equally, as from the hand of God, without amusing herself in reflecting on her pain or noticing what is given her. She should not even think of the remedies that would be necessary or proper for her, much less should she prescribe them.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

Her patience and self abandonment.

A true religious never complains ; she always believes that too much care is taken of her ; if she exposes her wants and inconveniences, it is without exaggeration ; and she commits all that concerns her to her superior, leaving the care of what is necessary to her to whom it belongs. Submissive to the infirmarian, she obeys simply and promptly, even in things the most

difficult, thinking only of supporting her indisposition with peace and submission to the orders of God, loving the dispensations of his providence, even in her sufferings, and keeping herself more intimately united to him in sickness than in health.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

How she ought to regard a state of sickness.

It is in this exact obedience and entire submission of herself that the greatest fruit of sickness consists, which should be received, not only as a just punishment sent from God, but also as a precious favor of his mercy, by which he gives us a thousand means of practicing true virtue.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

How careful she ought to be in sickness, to conform herself to Jesus Christ suffering, and to abandon herself to God.

A religious in this situation cannot take too much care to conform herself to Jesus Christ suffering. It is then that she should have his holy passion more particularly

before her eyes, to abandon herself to his providence, and to commit herself to his bounty in all that he will be pleased to ordain. Her only occupation must be to keep her mind employed with God; to enter with love into the designs of his mercy over her; penetrated with this great truth, that if one knew the treasures found in tribulations and sufferings, she could not forbear ardently desiring them.

CHAPTER XL.

How remote she ought to be from using the reliefs that might disedify her neighbor, and cause her to lose the spirit of her vocation.

It is in these holy sentiments that a religious of the Visitation, who has consecrated to God her person and her life, should rather hazard it, and sacrifice her health, than preserve both by means unworthy of her state, which tend to the scandal of her neighbor and dishonor her profession, as going out to take the benefit of baths and waters, or the change of air, &c., which

cannot be done without the danger of losing the spirit of her vocation, which is difficult to be preserved, how little soever one mingles with the world. This is what a true daughter of the Visitation should carefully avoid, and refuse with great firmness; and though she might have on this point the example of other religious orders, she should prefer rather to suffer all kinds of pains, and even death itself, than fail in the intentions of her holy Founder, and counteract what he has so expressly declared against this abuse, as well as against the pernicious ambition of desiring and accepting Abbeyes.

CHAPTER XLI.

How remote she should be from accepting Abbeyes.

We cannot find terms sufficiently strong to express the great aversion which St. Francis de Sales had for this folly. Our holy Mother de Chantal has assured us that if he had believed that it would have entered the minds of his daughters, he

would never have instituted his congregation; considering this ambition capable of ruining all its happiness, peace, and sanctity. Nothing is so important to a religious as to enter into this spirit, to follow these sentiments, and to comprehend the force of these words of the Wiseman :

“He who neglects his way shall be killed.”

CHAPTER XLII.

Her exactitude never to stray from the path marked out for her.

She should walk therein, without turning either to the right or to the left, referring all the advices and instructions she may receive to a punctual observance of all that regards her institute, never admitting any thing contrary to it; assured that though it were good for others, it would not be so for her. Each one should perfect herself according to her vocation by an attachment to her rule, remembering that exactitude in the observance of it, is so requisite, that if once the bond of the respect and obedience due to the rules be broken, all will go to ruin.

CHAPTER XLIII.

She should be equally as faithful in the least as in the most considerable actions.

St. Francis de Sales would not countenance the least difference in the observances; he desired that his daughters should be attentive to practice all to the letter, without distinction, fully persuaded, that this attention and fidelity to the observances which appear the smallest and the most common will be the most pleasing to God, and attract upon them special graces.

CHAPTER XLIV.

True simplicity makes no distinction in those things in which the will of God is manifest.

A soul that loves God truly, subjects herself to all that is his will, without considering any thing else than the respect and entire dependence which she owes his divine ordinance. This is the height of perfect humility, and should be the only object of a simple soul, that is to say, of a

soul that pretends, in what she does, only to accomplish the good pleasure of God, which she finds in the observance of her rules.

CHAPTER XLV.

What should be the union among the Sisters and on what it depends.

A daughter of the Visitation should preserve union with all, and this should engage her to have but one heart, and one soul, with all those to whom she is united by one same vocation. Let her keep herself always in this unity of mind by the bond of charity, which is that of perfection; thus she will correspond to the end for which, according to St. Augustin, she should have entered the monastery, and it is by her exactitude in practicing all that can entertain and perfect this union, that she will abundantly receive the effect of that admirable prayer which Jesus Christ made to his Father, the eve of his holy passion, supplicating him that, as his Father is in him, and he in his Father, so we also might be united in him, and made perfect in one.

CHAPTER XLVI.

The obligation which this union imposes on the Sisters towards each other.

This holy union should be not only in the heart, but it must extend to all the actions and conduct of a true religious, who should bear a cordial love to her sisters, preventing them in respect, as the Apostle ordains; always preferring them to herself, and being glad that they are preferred to her; esteeming all that they do; charitably covering their defects; yielding in every thing to their will and judgment; rendering them service in all their necessities; and loving not less their happiness and repose than her own. In fine, the rule of this charity, so expressly recommended by St. Francis de Sales, is never to refuse to do or to suffer all that is possible to oblige our neighbor, in what she may desire, if it be not contrary to what is due to God.

CHAPTER XLVII.

What should be the sentiments of a daughter of the Visitation for all kinds of persons.

A daughter of the Visitation should moreover respect and honor all kinds of

persons, without despising any one, how poor, vile, or abject soever she may be. She ought to view all christians only in the quality of children of God and members of Jesus Christ, and cordially embrace them in the unity of this divine body, in which all distinction of poor and rich, master and slave, learned and ignorant, is lost and annihilated. It is in this same body she should consider herself, and this should constitute her glory and her happiness. She ought to labor daily, more and more, to render herself a worthy member of the church, referring to this end all her exercises and good works, performing all her prayers in communion with those of the church, and, as it were, to put something from her funds into this common treasury, endeavoring to diffuse around her the order of good example.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

What should be her love for her neighbor, and sentiments for other Orders.

It is thus she should contribute to the salvation of her neighbor, which she should

desire as her own, frequently offering her meditations and communions for all the different states and necessities of the world. She ought to have a special regard for all religious orders, which she should cordially love, esteem, cherish, and respect ; stifling every sentiment of jealousy or displeasure that might arise in seeing them excel her own, and carefully repressing even the desire to equal those houses distinguished by any kind of glory and reputation. Actuated by the spirit of the primitive christians, let her ever acknowledge and love her baseness and abjection, and be always disposed to gratify and please others as far as her state permits, with a noble and generous heart, which spares nothing for the utility and consolation of her neighbor ; preserving peace as much as possible, and avoiding even the smallest differences.

CHAPTER XLIX.

Her horror for law suits, and her disposition if they cannot be avoided.

If such procedures must be entered upon, after having taken all the precautions mark-

ed by Constitution xxix, and the answer on Chapter xix, of the rule, a religious should preserve, with regard to the judges and parties concerned, a constant charity, and an exact silence on all that could alter peace, as much and more than on what would be contrary to the interests of her house. She must remember that her profession obliges her to behave with so much generosity, that she willingly yield as far as she can for the sake of charity, as Jesus Christ has taught. St. Francis de Sales, in imitation of this divine Savior, has most earnestly recommended it. He desires that on those occasions we should always sacrifice something to those who wish it; assuring us, that this is requisite to preserve the good order of monasteries, and evincing in the most sensible manner his great aversion for all kinds of disputes; not being able to suffer that we should have or testify any ardor or attachment for the things of the world. This particularly regards the superior, and those whom obedience employs in the affairs of the house; for a simple religious should not even know

whether there be law suits carried on or not. But if it happen that they have any knowledge of them, they should enter into the same spirit.

CHAPTER L.

What should be the love of a daughter of the Visitation for the will of God, and her abnegation for her own.

Animated with these holy sentiments, a daughter of the Visitation should be distinguished by her perfect devotedness to the will of God in all things. Therefore she should rejoice that there is not one of her actions which bears not the character of this divine will, that all her time is regulated thereby, and that there remains not a moment in the disposition of which she is not directed by obedience: that her heart and mind as well as her body are no longer at her own disposal, but perfectly subject to the conduct of her superiors; that she may not live conformably to her own judgment, wisdom and direction, but according to that of another, without seeking her contentment in any thing whatever.

CHAPTER LI.

The buildings and furniture of the monastery.

The buildings of the house, all the furniture thereof, and even the smallest things which are for her use, have been exactly regulated as to the matter and form, with a very great detail, that there may be nothing, in all that surrounds her, which savors not of the spirit of poverty and simplicity that should reign among the true servants of God.

CHAPTER LII.

What should be observed at the burials of the Sisters.

What is ordained with regard to her interment should remind her of the poverty she professes. Our holy Mother de Chantal has expressly declared that we should keep exactly to the small number of priests prescribed by Constitution L.; having remarked that when the prelates wish to perform the office they should be entreated to

bring as few ecclesiastics as possible, and not to multiply the ceremonies, but to observe humility and perfect simplicity, in which the religious of the Visitation should live, and which alone should embellish their interment.

CHAPTER LIII.

How much the spirit of this order requires a removal from all that could gratify the senses, even in those things which have reference to piety.

It is for this reason that all singing and instrumental music are retrenched, and all that can render devotion effeminate, in gratifying the senses, as also every thing that savors eclat in piety, or nourishes what might remain in them of the human mind; since they are called to act only by the spirit of faith. In the Constitution xxxviii. St. Francis de Sales forbids that in any part of the house, and especially in the church, there be any dolls of devotion to represent our Lord, the blessed Virgin, or the Angels, nor any thing of

the kind; permitting only pictures that are well executed, and which shall have been approved of by the spiritual Father.

CHAPTER LIV.

The character of the spirit of piety, simplicity, and humility.

Now, if there be any who pretend that this exterior embellishment may serve to excite piety, let them remember that this having been proposed to our holy Mother de Chantal, she answered that it was not the attraction by which God wished to animate the piety of the daughters of the blessed Virgin, and that no other was requisite for them than that of piety itself, humility, and simplicity.

CHAPTER LV.

That every thing should be done through an impulse of grace, and nothing through that of nature.

This spirit requires a life always equal and uniform, and that we accomplish the most common and ordinary observances

with a love always new, sustained by a strength and holy generosity, which keep the soul elevated above the senses, and make her act in all things through grace, which mortifies and destroys more and more our humors and passions. It is this that renders her constant and faithful through all the disgusts, drynesses, temptations, and difficulties that she can experience; it renders her attentive to the solid practice of virtue, and gives her a patience proof against injuries, sufferings, and contradictions; a sincere and profound humility, which is preserved amid contempts, confusions, and abjections; a meekness and an equality which sustain her notwithstanding diversity of sentiments, events, and occupations, and make her obey in all things with simplicity, promptitude and exactness, regardless of the repugnances of human nature.

CHAPTER LVI.

What St. Francis de Sales had principally in view in establishing his congregation.

This little work encloses the true perfection which St. Francis de Sales desired

to establish in all his houses, to supply so many prayers, ceremonies, and austerities, that are practiced in other orders, and which he did not wish to have introduced into his, that it might always be an asylum for those persons, who cannot have access to the more austere, and who, before the holy institution of this order, were constrained to remain in the world, exposed to continual occasions of sin, or, at least, in danger of losing the fervor of devotion.

CHAPTER LVII.

To consider only the interior disposition in the choice of the subjects who present themselves.

It is in favor of these kind of persons that St. Francis de Sales has established his congregation, which he desired should be a retreat for the aged, the infirm, the feeble, those of a delicate complexion, the lame, the blind, and deformed. He wished that human prudence should not cause us to reject them, provided they be not entirely incapable of following the rule and

ordinary exercises, and that they have a sound mind, and be well disposed to live in their infirmities, with a profound humility, obedience, meekness, simplicity, and resignation; for if these persons who have infirm bodies, have not a good mind, and if they are not determined to tend to the height of sanctity, by the practice of true virtues, their retreat would be useless to themselves, and of great prejudice to the monastery.

CHAPTER LVIII.

With what charity the strong Sisters ought to aid and support the infirm.

Those strong persons whom God has called to religion to succor and assist the infirm, should ever remember that to satisfy the end of their institute it suffices not to receive them, but they must treat, serve and relieve them in all their wants, without becoming weary by the length of their infirmities, or testifying any disgust or repugnance on account of the labor and expense incurred by their continual mala-

dies. On the contrary, they should consider them as the living images of Jesus Christ crucified, and accomplish, with a constant generosity and persevering charity, all the intentions of St. Francis de Sales in the institution of his congregation, which was to provide a place for the poor infirm to glorify God in their sufferings, and to the persons more robust to exercise charity towards them, and to merit, in practicing it, the reward of their patience and labors.

GOD BE PRAISED.

LIVE † JESUS.

Maxims of the venerable Mother de Chantal of the Visitation.

MAXIM I.

On Humility.

The true virtue of humility consists in this, that when we are humbled, we humble ourselves still more; when we are accused, we accuse ourselves still more; if we be employed in low things, to acknowledge that it is much above what we merit; if we be removed to be glad of it; and thus we shall become truly humble. Humility is the general principle of our order.

A daughter could not give a greater mark of her incapacity than to believe herself capable; this is contrary to humility, which makes us esteem ourselves insufficient for every thing: if we knew what God requires of the daughters of the Visitation, and how much the souls who exalt themselves and make parade of vanity grieve the spirit of God, we would beg that

fire from heaven would consume those who infringe his designs.

I could wish to engrave this maxim with my blood, which will, if it be observed, maintain the whole institute in union and conformity: would to God that my lips were pierced with a red-hot iron, that for ever the mouths of the daughters of this congregation might be closed against the least word contrary to humility; nothing being more capable of shortening my days than to see vanity among them.

Let us by no means rejoice for the favorable receptions which our institute receives, but let us humble ourselves and thereby glorify God; for to be a true daughter of the blessed Virgin, is to esteem contempt and to condemn honor.

Without solid humility there are but shadows and simple images of virtue: blessed is the soul that humbles herself before God, and accuses herself before creatures; she will invariably recover what she may have lost by her fault: humility of heart, submission of will and judgment, should be the foundation of our perfection.

Humility is the mother of all sanctity, which attributes nothing to itself, but refers the glory of all to God ; it is the key of God's treasury ; if the soul present herself before him without this key, she will never participate in the riches enclosed in the eternal coffers, but will eternally remain poor and miserable.

I supplicate you, sisters, let us have at heart the practice of this holy humility ; but let it be a generous humility, which fears only sin, which has a holy liberty that depends and holds but on the will of God ; so that wherever she sees it, she runs to embrace it, not ostentatiously, but simply and humbly receiving with equal love, through respect to his most holy will, contempt and humiliations as honors and elevations.

MAXIM II.

On Poverty.

Poverty is the most precious treasure of the servants of God ; therefore, sisters, let us not seek temporal conveniences, but let us rejoice to be despoiled of earthly things,

since we participate in the spiritual riches of the house of God.

The true disciples of Jesus Christ love to see holy poverty appear in their sacristies, dormitories, refectories, and other places.

The practice of true poverty, consists in a privation, not only of useful things, but even of those that are necessary. It is not perfected in having quitted all for God, but must also love to suffer for him.

Let us willingly accustom ourselves to the little wants and daily contradictions which are met in the order of the providence of God ; let us tenderly cherish them as means which he has destined us from all eternity, and which he presents us to attain perfection : but if he sometimes delay his assistance to try our confidence, let us expect it in peace ; for he says : Cast thy care and thy thought upon the Lord and he will nourish thee.

It would be a great imperfection to desire to have all our conveniences, whether in nourishment, clothing, or other things, since too great a solicitude for temporal

things, would diminish and even ruin the primitive spirit of our rule.

We must be very careful not to complain of the effects of poverty ; such a conduct is displeasing to God and man. We must support its inconveniences with great courage, rendering ourselves unshaken on this word : “ Seek first the kingdom of God, and his justice and all things shall be added unto you.”

Oh ! how delightful it is, to see the servants of God, as says the Apostle, gaining their life by the labor of their hands, and having no other to-morrow than that of divine Providence !

MAXIM III.

On Obedience.

If we are not submissive and obedient, we are but phantoms of religion : for she who vows obedience, and afterwards assumes the government of herself, violates her vow ; and after having died for God, miserably suffers herself to resuscitate through self-love.

It is a true mark that a soul does not view God alone, when she seeks to obey according to her will and not according to that of divine Providence. Oh ! how great a desire have I to see you advance in the perfection of holy love, by a perfect submission to your superiors, and by an equal docility to any one that has authority over you.

She who will obey with all her heart any superior whatever, may boldly say, “the Lord governs me, and I shall need nothing.”

It appears to me that I should have more satisfaction in obeying the least sister, who would only contradict me, commanding me in a harsh and severe manner, than in submitting to the most capable and experienced in the whole order ; for where there is less of the creature, there is more of the Creator ; and the obedience is more solid, pure, and simple, for his glory.

I should have no esteem, I assure you, for a religious, how holy soever she might seem to be, if I did not see her ready to do all, to go every where, and to suffer every

thing, at the least intimation of obedience, and of the will of God.

It is immaterial to a daughter of the blessed Virgin where she is, provided she find a house of the Visitation in which she can observe her vows and rules.

They who attach themselves to places, to houses, or to superiors, show indeed that they seek not God purely.

If we seek God every where, we shall every where find him, and if it be less gratifying to our self-love, it will be more agreeable to his divine Majesty.

Our holy Father wished us to attach ourselves to his spirit, and not to his person; and as long as we obey one more willingly than another, we are not true servants of God. In fine, my dear daughters, let us so well subject all our inclinations to the dead rule, that we may be as living rules.

MAXIM IV.

Abandonment to divine Providence.

As it is from the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks, our worthy Mother, on

all occasions, alleged these divine words : *Providence ! Providence !* the will of God in prosperity or adversity : when afflicted, we should annihilate our hearts, and adhere to God.

The confidence of christian souls should consist in a perfect abandonment to him, above and beyond all human view and prudence.

Oh, how great a happiness it is to walk in this perfect dependance on the sovereign Providence, invariably remaining under the divine protection.

Our great God disdains not to employ his wisdom in conducting a poor, little creature : why, then, will we take care of ourselves ?

Let us accustom ourselves to neglect many things and desire very little, remitting all to the providence of the celestial Father, who is not willing that those souls whom he cherishes rest their hopes on earthly riches, but on those eternal goods which he prepares for them in his infinite goodness.

Not that it is requisite to shut the ears of our heart to the voice of all creatures,

whether reasonable or sensitive, or to those that have but a simple degree of existence; for, though their harmony is passing, they are a great help to the soul who considers them as instruments of divine Providence.

We must love sovereignly the good pleasure of God, embracing equally things that are painful and agreeable, that it may increase in us the hope of beatitude; for God disposes of all things for the good of his children.

If we follow his designs over us, though heaven and earth should be overturned, we would not desist from considering it, since it is immaterial whether we suffer or enjoy, provided the divine will be accomplished.

Good souls are as tranquil in tribulation as in consolation, since their beatitude consists in submission to the will of God and in the increase of his divine love.

A soul that is totally abandoned to the celestial Providence, is unshaken in all kinds of events; she wills but God, she sees but God, she attaches herself but to God, she belongs unreservedly to God.

MAXIM V.

Of Mortification.

I announce to you, my dear daughters, an infallible truth, that it is impossible for you to enter heaven without doing violence to yourselves ; for our Lord has hidden the price of his glory in the victory which we gain over nature : therefore, engrave deeply in your hearts this intimate resolution of overcoming yourselves, and offering violence on all occasions, to acquire virtue, and to render yourselves conformable and exact to what the rule ordains, at the sacrifice of all your inclinations.

Your intention in coming to the Visitation should have been to divest yourselves of yourselves, that you might be united to God ; it is a little earth, in which, if one dies not to herself, she will never bear fruits worthy of her vocation, and you cannot be spouses of Jesus Christ, but in as much as you will crucify your judgment, your will, and inclinations, to conform yourselves to him.

You have quitted the world to embrace a religious life : this Spouse of your hearts makes you ascend, and powerfully attracts to himself on the Mount of Calvary, where, crowned with thorns, he permits himself to be stripped naked, nailed to the cross, gall to be given him to drink, despised to the utmost rigor, his side pierced with a lance, and finally he endures for you thousands of pains most violent and dolorous to his holy humanity ; you must then cheerfully remain there, endeavoring to imitate him by an entire conformity, which consists in two points.

The first is to divest yourselves of yourselves, laboring courageously and faithfully at your perfection ; for, my dear daughters, we came from the world quite rough, unpolished, and full of bad inclinations, which we must smooth and retrench to be able to unite ourselves to our Lord. It is not he who should reform himself, to be united to us, for he is all beautiful and perfect ; but it is we who must destroy our imperfections, to conform and adjust ourselves to him.

The second point is, to suffer yourselves to be mortified and flayed, and your hearts subdued in such a manner as they please, for you must use no reserve towards God, but give him all, by an entire resignation and abandonment of yourselves into the hands of those who conduct you ; let them despoil you of every thing, if they please ; let them contradict your inclinations as they wish ; let them never condescend to any one of them ; let them make you labor when you wish to remain in your cells, and make you sew when you wish to spin ; let them mortify and humble you when you wish to be caressed and esteemed ; in fine, let them accuse you in the most sensible points ; if you resist, you will not be the spouses of Jesus crucified, and you will never attain perfection. But, if you renounce yourselves and abandon all without reserve, you will experience unspeakable sweetness in the service of God, and it will be your delight to destroy nature, and establish the reign of grace. “ I will give to them that overcome, says our divine Savior, a hidden manna, of which, as soon

as they shall have tasted a little, they will no longer care for earthly delights." But remark, that you must be conquerors to taste this manna, since it is not for the slothful, but for souls that are valiant, strong, and courageous, who are resolved to destroy in themselves whatever they know to be displeasing to God, contrary to his will and divine intentions; who retain nothing, but give all; who do not permit themselves to be governed by the movements of nature, but are guided on all occasions by a principle of grace. It is true, this violence must be mild, according to the spirit of our holy Founder, but equally firm, making us unceasingly labor with a constant, strong, and amorous fidelity, since it is for God and for eternity; for the heart that does not tend to, and aim at perfection, is advancing in the way of perdition. Oh! my dear daughters, destroy your enemy courageously and manfully; for by his death you will acquire the peace and life of your soul.

I know one who has made an extraordinary progress by this practice of overcom-

ing herself in every thing—in her mind, body, inclinations, passions, affections, desires, and natural humors; having advanced more, in a short time, than many others who were less inclined to mortification.

In fine, we are in a valley of tears, in which we must fight, suffer, and labor to gain heaven: the church of God is called militant, because the faithful who are its members should continually mortify themselves; subjecting the flesh to the spirit, and nature to grace, for we will never be agreeable to God but by a strong, generous, and persevering practice of this holy virtue.

MAXIM VI.

On Exactitude in the Observances.

My dear daughters, remember this sentence, pronounced by the eternal Wisdom: “He that shall break one of the least of these commandments, and shall so teach men, shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven.”

Have greatly at heart a punctuality to the observances, but a punctuality which is

gay, amorous, and without restraint, proceeding from the interior, which attaches itself to the spirit and not to the letter.

It is well to observe the rule which ordains to be prompt at the first sound of the bell, but it is much better to practice that which teaches a perfect abnegation of self-will.

I know not any rule which urges so forcibly as this : “ They shall do all things in a spirit of profound, sincere and candid humility ; ” for it must be remarked, that what is said of this rule, extends to all the others, in spirit, and not in words and looks.

But we must observe them with a generosity of soul, so that divine love be the principle that urges us ; to keep silence, to submit ourselves to the least observances, to receive humiliations with joy, and to suffer cheerfully all kinds of inconveniences and things the most painful, rendering ourselves so careful in the observances that we omit not a single point of them ; finally, that this celestial love be our motive, end, and pretention, in all we do.

A COLLECTION

Of some Maxims and Instructions on the practice of virtues which has not been inserted in the preceding discourses.

This mystical sign, approaching its end, invites us, before concluding, to notice the remainder of her beautiful words, maxims, and instructions, since all these things compose a part of the article of her last will and testament, and of the table of the law of holy love, which she has left to her congregation: but we should be animated with zeal, which consumed her, in pronouncing these words: “Oh, that I had an inflamed dart, wherewith to enkindle in your hearts the love of the perfection and virtue which our vocation requires! for, my very dear daughters, religion is an academy of every virtue, and a secure way to conduct our souls to a union with our celestial Spouse. It is his school, in which he himself becomes the master of our hearts, instructing them in his divine pleasure by means of his inspirations, of our rules, and our superiors. The world teaches its

children only deceit and vanity ; but Jesus Christ teaches his, truth, mortification, and humility. It is the gate of heaven and the house of God, in which those who seek him in simplicity, fail not to find him.

We are enclosed in our beloved cloisters as chosen souls, to sing continually the canticle of love and of the divine pleasure. Let us often reflect on the happiness of a religious life and the greatness of this benefit, by which God has drawn us from the service of the world, to enter that of his divine Majesty : he has separated us from its troubles and solitudes, that we might have no other care than to please him ; he has taken us in his arms to carry us, notwithstanding our resistance, to this holy vocation, in which we have so many occasions of insuring our salvation, and none of losing it, except through our own malice. Let us endeavor to be most grateful for this favor, which should be weighed with the weights of the sanctuary : the perfection which our celestial Spouse requires is founded on true and solid virtues and not on natural gifts. Our holy Father spoke

very little of extraordinary and supernatural favors, because he conducted souls more by a solidity of abnegation, humility, and simplicity, than by other ways more elevated; and when he observed in any one of his daughters an attraction to the most sublime prayer, if he did not see also in her the foundation of solid virtue, he made no account of it; but he loved much courageous souls who were absolutely and efficaciously inclined to virtue, notwithstanding what might happen, without examining whether they had any relish or disgust, pleasure or displeasure, consolation or desolation; he wished that amid interior peace, as amid bitterness, they should tend directly to God by an absolute abandonment and abnegation of themselves in a profound humility, sincerity, meekness of heart, and equality of mind. These souls were perfectly dear to him, though he did not neglect others, who were more cowardly, and who, he was accustomed to say, were so rooted in the love of themselves, that, notwithstanding the unceasing labors bestowed on them, if they ever produced

either flowers or fruits, it would be very late. Such are those indolent souls who turn a deaf ear to the holy attractions and admonitions of divine love, which invites them to renounce this inclination, to combat this imperfection, to rise from that fall, and to embrace such and such a virtue. Oh! how much are these poor souls to be pitied; for the spirit of God retires when we resist his inspirations and refuse our consent. The Spouse, in the canticles, says that the bed is narrow, and will not admit two, testifying the desire he has of possessing entirely our affections and desires, nor will he be united to us until they be adjusted to his; and that soul who is constant, and who, in spite of the difficulties of nature, ceases not to do what she believes to be pleasing to God, is his well beloved.

We must then serve him constantly, with an unequalled love, and an entire devotedness of our whole being, for though one should perform miracles, and yet fail in the practice of virtue, she would not be a servant of Jesus Christ. I cannot support ungenerous souls, who are indifferent about

their perfection, for the holy scripture says, “He who neglects his way, shall be killed;” and “he who overcomes shall be crowned with glory.” Courage, then, my dear daughters, since no one is worthy of serving in the house of God who is not humble, devout, and mortified. The means of attaining it, are a love of solitude, prayer, and mortification; for a true religious should view earthly pleasures only through the cross of her Spouse—that is to say, with an eye of disdain: this is why the saints loved prisons not only for the sake of innocence, justice, and abjection, but also from a spirit of penance, retreat, and contempt of the world.

Pious lectures which incline the soul to the practice of virtues, to a fear and respect for the judgments of God, and a holy dread of the account which must be rendered to him, are very useful; for how advanced soever a soul may be in spirituality, if she nourish not this filial fear, she will gradually recede from the path of perfection. With regard to temptations, they serve as a spur to virtue: they who are exercised by them,

should take the wings of a dove, and fly to the cliffs of the rock—the sacred wounds of Jesus—and there remain tranquilly, without motion or the least reply: finally, virtues are a mystical chain that should be linked by prudence, as our holy Mother, the church, teaches us; but to practice them well, we must blend ten thousand ounces of simplicity with one of prudence. This conduct will teach us to attach ourselves to what is solid, without regarding what is pleasing, and not to judge of virtue by appearances of fervor or recollection; by sentiments of perfection and exterior practices, which commonly are the effects of nature, and remain as long as sensible devotion continues, but when this subsides and trials or aridities succeed, the soul becomes troubled, because she does not find herself such as she imagined.

We must penetrate our hearts and examine whether virtue is rooted therein, and our affection for it, such as causes us to produce acts of it on all occasions; amid desolations, contradictions, and humiliations, as in consolations and agreeable

occurrences. If our affection for poverty makes us love to suffer its inconveniences, or if humility keeps us base and abject in our own eyes, and makes us desire to be reputed and treated as such ; if we have a benign charity in supporting amiably the contradictions which happen to us on the part of our neighbor, without complaining, or thinking that he does wrong, but attributing the cause of the injury to ourselves, or a patience tranquil and without sadness amid our pains and labors ; in fine, if our submission renders us indifferent to all kinds of obediences and superiors, or if simplicity keeps us united to the divine will in contradictions, inclining us to receive indifferently from the hand of our good God, all that happens to us, without any kind of reflection. Thus of all other virtues, the practices of which occur at every moment by the order of divine Providence and our holy observances ; our principal care should be to keep our hearts tranquilly united to God, that we may the better discern the light which he will impart to us, and faithfully follow it ;

having no other solicitude than to preserve it: finally, my dear daughters, the life of man is deceitful and short; eternity approaches; let us advance towards it by a faithful practice of the virtues which will obtain for us, with the grace of God, its happy possession.

In conclusion, we may say of this mother, whom we believe elect and predestined, that having been truly conformable to the image of the Son of God during the time and in all the situations of her admirable and precious life, she may serve as the model of all virtuous souls; for in her secular life, she was an example to christian ladies; in the monastic state, the mirror of souls truly religious; and in her supereminent life, which she passed in the exercise of true and solid virtues, God has rendered her the prototype of perfect souls, so that we may invite all christians, as did St. Paul, to be imitators of her, as she was of Jesus Christ.

SENTIMENTS

Of St. Francis de Sales on the Sacred Heart of Jesus, drawn from his writings.

The religious of the Visitation, who will be so happy as faithfully to observe their rules, may truly be called Evangelical Daughters, established in this last age to honor and imitate the meekness and humility of the adorable heart of the word incarnate. These virtues being the basis and foundation of their order, entitle them also to the privilege and incomparable favor of bearing the appellation of daughters of the sacred heart of Jesus.

If the sisters of this congregation, adds our Father, are very humble and faithful to God, they will have the heart of Jesus, their crucified Spouse, as their place of retreat and repose in this world, and his celestial palace for their abode in eternal life. God made known to Mother Ann Margaret Clement, superior of the Visitation of Melun, who died in the odor of sanctity, that St. Francis de Sales during his life made his abode in the sacred heart of Jesus, in which his repose was never interrupted

by the most distracting occupations Moses, by conversing familiarly with God, became the meekest of men, and our amiable Saint, by his intimate union with the divine heart of Jesus, acquired in the most eminent degree, the two virtues of this adorable heart—humility and meekness. It was this that induced him to establish an order in the church, to honor in a particular manner this adorable heart, by the practice of these two virtues, which are the foundation of the rules of the Daughters of the Visitation ; and as the different orders which are in the church are destined to honor some particular virtue of the Son of God, so that of the Visitation is established to render a continual homage to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, in his hidden and annihilated life.

A D V I C E

Of our holy Founder to our worthy Mother, copied from the original, written with her own hand, in her Book of Constitutions, which is carefully preserved at our second Monastery of Rennes.

I desire that you be extremely little and low in your own eyes, meek and condescending as the dove; that you love your abjection and practice it faithfully; embrace readily and with a good heart all the occasions which may present themselves to this effect. Be not prompt in speaking, but reply slowly, humbly, and meekly, and say much in remaining silent, through modesty and equality.

Support and excuse your neighbor very much and with great meekness of heart.

Do not philosophize upon the contradictions which befall you, not considering them at all, but only God, in all things, without any exception whatever, and acquiesce quite simply to his orders.

Do all things for God, uniting and continuing your union with him by simple looks and flowings of your heart towards him.

Be not eager for any thing; do all things tranquilly, in a spirit of repose.

Lose not your interior peace for any thing whatever, though all should be thrown into confusion; for what are all things in this life when compared to peace of soul.

Recommend all things to God and keep yourself tranquil and in repose on the bosom of his paternal Providence.

In all occurrences be invariably faithful in this resolution of remaining in a most simple unity and unique simplicity of adherence to God, through a love of perfect confidence, abandoning yourself to the mercy of the love and eternal care which the divine Providence has for you. Though your mind should stray from it, lead it back gently and very simply.

Remain constantly in a most holy nakedness of mind, without clothing yourself with any cares, desires, pretentions, or affections, under any pretext whatever.

Our Lord loves you ; he wishes you to be all his ; have no other arms in which you are carried than his ; no other bosom on which you repose than his divine Providence ; cast not your views elsewhere, but fix your mind on him alone.

Keep your will so intimately united to his, that nothing may divide them ; forget all the rest, and no longer amuse yourself with it, for God desires your beauty and simplicity.

Have great courage, and keep yourself humbly abased before the divine Majesty. Desire nothing but the pure love of our Lord.

Refuse nothing, how painful soever it may be. Clothe yourself with our Lord crucified ; love him in his sufferings, and make ejaculatory prayers on them.

Perform his will, my dearest Mother, my true daughter ; my soul and my mind bless you with all their affection ; and may Jesus Christ do in us, with us, through us, and for himself, his most holy will. Amen. "I have, thanks to God, my eyes fixed on this Eternal Providence, whose decrees will be for ever the laws of my heart."

A P R A Y E R

To our holy Founder composed by our worthy Mother, written with her own hand in the same book.

Oh ! most happy St. Francis de Sales, the true servant of our Lord, the dear and most assured guide of my soul, the precious gift of my God, my true Father, I say, my most sweet Master, and now my faithful Advocate, behold our necessities, and the heart that God has united to yours. Do not permit that it ever be separated from it ; remember you have promised me that this union would be eternal. Obtain then, my most venerable Father, by your holy intercession, that I be faithful to the observance of the things you have taught me, that I attain to that unity which you now enjoy so gloriously ; that I may, with you, in the company of the glorious Virgin and the Saints, praise, bless, and love eternally the beloved of our souls. It is this I beg of you, not only for myself, but for all the children of the holy church, and in particular

for the dear congregation which you have established in our Lord, and of which you made remembrance in your holy prayers during your pilgrimage. You see, oh most holy Father, the desires of my soul; I will not express them to you. You know the veneration which I have for you; you behold my tears, my sentiments, and the perfect confidence I will have in your holy protection. My Father, my Master, and my Saint, remember that God has given me to you, and you to me. Have then a continual care of me, I entreat you, that I may accomplish perfectly the holy will of my God without reserve. Amen.

A D V I C E .

Our venerable Mother Claude Agnes Joly de la Roche, fourth religious of the order, leaving our worthy Mother de Chantal, for divers foundations, which were always to separate her from our holy foundress, received from her among other testimonies of her tender affection, her Book of Constitutions. This she carried about her, from which the above was taken: and

the said Mother De la Roche dying in our first Monastery of Rennes in 1630, left it to our dear sister Mary Francis Louvel, her Infirmarian, who has since come in quality of Assistant, to the foundation of this second monastery, in which this precious volume is kept as a relic.

GOD BE PRAISED.



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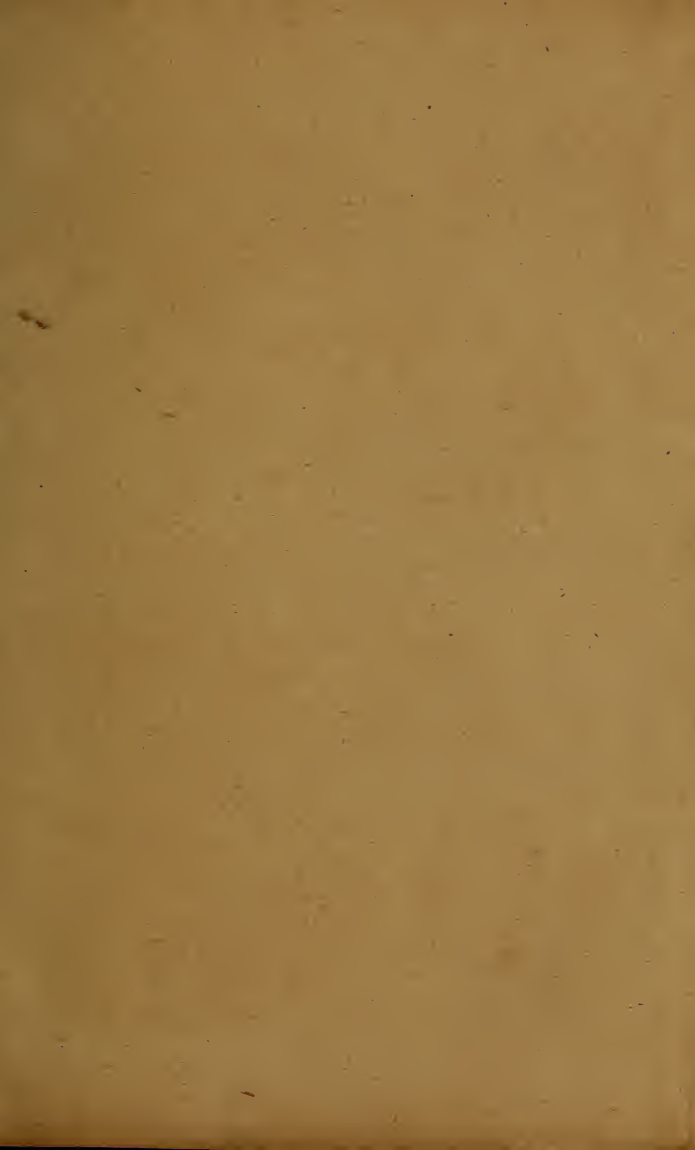
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*Extract from a letter of the Most Reverend Arch
Bishop.*

“I have looked through the work which Mr. Templeman is about to publish. It has my cordial approbation. Should it not be too late, he would do well to put on the title page, or other convenient place, the usual form :” With the approbation of the Most Reverend Arch-bishop Eccleston.





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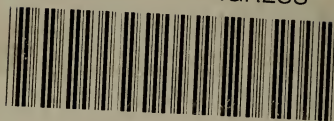
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